

Disclaimer: All publicly recognizable characters, settings, etc. are the property of their respective owners. The original characters and plot are the property of the author. The author is in no way associated with the owners, creators, or producers of any media franchise. No copyright infringement is intended.

Harry Potter and the Unspeakable Time

Chapter 1: The Final Straw

“Boy. House. Now.”

A short young man, looking about 15 cringed at the tone of his uncle's voice, though long years of living with the Dursleys have taught him better than to delay. Carefully pulling his trunk out of the boot of his Uncle's car, he quickly made his way into the house. Fear quickly shoved the pain of recent events out of his mind as he noticed his huge Uncle's face turning a particularly vile shade of puce. ‘Why couldn't they leave well enough alone?’ the young wizard thought to himself. He knew Mad-Eye and the others MEANT well, but they could not understand the sheer depth of Vernon's hatred of anything that didn't finish his narrow view of ‘normal.’ Not only that, but Vernon considered himself to be the king of his home, and would brook no one telling him what he could and could not do. The threats the Order gave him would be sure to push the already rotund man over the edge. His Aunt Petunia and their son followed behind the young man, one with a pinched face and one with an almost expectant gaze.

“So,” the enraged man grumbled as he grabbed the young wizard by the neck and threw him further in the hallway, “You thought you could make up any story you wanted, and it would never reach us. Is that it boy?” The large man advanced on the younger one as his wife shut the door, making sure the neighbors wouldn't see a thing. “We fed you, we sheltered you, and you make up stories about us to your freaky friends, so that they think your life is in danger. Is that the way it is boy?” Vernon bellowed the last question as he grabbed the returning teen by the neck, shaking him violently.

Harry Potter felt something snap in his neck with that shake, causing the lower parts of him to go numb. In his mind though he could not

really find the strength to care. Instead he wished for a quick death as compared to the slow painful death he was about to receive. 'Mum, Dad, Sirius, I'll be there shortly . . . ' Somewhere deep within him the strength to protest welled up unbidden as he answered, "N . . . No Uncle Vernon, I didn't tell them any . . . anything." His neck felt like it was on fire as his breath hitched, making the young man's words come out scratchy and segmented.

"I'll not be lied to Boy. Nor will any freaks tell me what I can and can't do in my own house," the puce colored man bellowed into his nephew's face, covering him with spittle as he did so. But before Vernon could say anything else a loud bark echoed down the stairs from Harry's room. Disgusted, he threw the black-haired man onto the stairs, causing the younger man to fall in a heap. Beady eyes glanced up the stairs before the older man turned toward his son, who like Vernon resembled a young whale more than a human. "Dudley, go kill that ruddy owl. It's not as if the freak will need it ever again."

At the sneered words of his uncle Harry found the strength to do something. He didn't care much about himself at this point, but at least he could save one of his first friends. "NO!" he cried as he tried to scramble up the stairs, only to find his hand stepped on by his cousin as the young whale began to make his way up the stairs. Even though Harry's hand flared in pain with a few audible pops, he couldn't give up. Screaming what was soon to be his last words, he called out, "Hedwig, go get help! Fly away, fly for your life!" He was rewarded with a bark and hiss, then the sounds of a bird flapping away desperately.

This of course did not sit well with the Dursleys. Dudley climbed the stairs as quickly as he could and threw open the door, only to see Hedwig disappear into the sky. Petunia stood back, grimacing as her son came out of the freak's room to report the bird gone. Vernon's face turned darker and his lips paled into whiteness as his anger pushed him closer to heart-attack levels. "You'll pay for that Boy. I won't have to worry about your freaky friends. A call to the police will take care of things nicely. Though you won't be around to witness it," Coming up with what he thought would be a brilliant idea, he looked up at his son. "Dudders, it's time for one final game of "Harry

Hunting.”“ Dudley, sharing a wide grin of malicious glee with his Uncle, came back down stairs to start using the young wizard like a punching bag . . .

Ministry of Magic

Department of Mysteries

Deep within the Ministry of Magic, a grey-robed man walked quietly through a large room full of shelves. Every once in a while he'd stop, look around, and peer closely at the shelves, or more to the point the glass Orbs on them. Quite a few shelves were new though, and almost all of the orbs that would have occupied those shelves were long since swept up as shattered glass. Normally one would think the orbs would not shatter from mere impacts, but due to the very nature of the orbs in this room, that was one of two ways that they could be used. Thus when the battle occurred in this room a few short weeks ago a great many of the orbs became lost. It was sad really, for these orbs contained every prophecy that had still had validity in the modern world. Some were thousands of years old, some were recent. The topics they covered ranged from fish migrations in the Channel to the End of the World and everything in between.

A great many people wondered just how these prophecies got here, after all some of them were made on dying breaths of Seers and Prophets over millennia, and would therefore be impossible to get. This man knew the answer to that question, one of only three that did. He reflected on this method as he looked at some of the oldest prophecies in this room, sparing a glance toward the back of the large room. At the back of the room was another door that led into a smaller chamber, one only partly filled with some of the most important prophecies ever to be uttered. In the center of that smaller room stood a pedestal with a round stand on it. When a prophecy was made somewhere in the world, it would glow and produce a glass sphere with the prophecy inside. Most cases that orb would simply float to one of the shelves to be stored until it was retrieved. The important ones however, those that were to be ignored at the subject's peril, would emit a small chime until someone would collect it and either store it or notify those involved. The most important of

these would set off an alarm to notify this man or the other two so as to allow immediate decisions to be made.

The Unspeakable (for that is who this man was) found the events of a few weeks ago highly ironic. The fight here was over a prophecy that should have been given to one of the participants when he reached eleven years old. At least, that was according to Magical Law. The fact it wasn't caused a major investigation into what precisely happened, headed by no one other than the head of the DMLE, Amelia Bones, herself. The keeper of this room wasn't worried about charges being pressed against him however, mainly due to the fact that the reason this particular prophecy was not only misfiled but mishandled boiled down to one man: Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore. Why Dumbledore demanded that such an important prophecy be placed in the lower security section of the DOM is something the man swore would never quite understand, but he did. And he pulled every string he had as Supreme Mugwump of the ICW and Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot to make sure the prophecy was where it was housed until its destruction. These strings included a blanket denial of access not only to He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named but also to the other persons who it could apply to. With an importance rating of nine on a one to ten scale (10's being the end of the entire planet), it should have gone at least to the Potter and Longbottom parents when it was first made. At the very least, Harry Potter should have been notified on his eleventh birthday. There was even talk within the DOM that he would be offered whatever training he would need, at least amongst the highest ranking Unspeakables.

But that was nipped in the bud as well, very shortly after the attack on Godric's Hollow. Dumbledore had put a ban on the prophecy so that even if the Boy-Who-Lived came down there to view it, as was his right by Wizarding Law, he could not without the presence of the old man himself. The keeper of the prophecy hall found this strange, but kept his mouth shut both at the time and as recently as a month ago, when that particular prophecy was last discussed. It did not bode well to anger the Leader of the Light, even when one was a part of an almost completely autonomous part of the Ministry. The Old Man simply had too many contacts. Looking back however, he realized just how much of a mistake that was. Now not only was half or more of the prophecies in this room destroyed, but a man died. The keeper

knew Black from before the attack, and had been monitoring him for selection in the DOM, and was not happy to see such promise thrown away like a pawn. This death of course brought the man's thoughts back to the Headmaster of Hogwarts, a topic that was sure to sour his stomach.

He would have continued to think along this path for a couple of hours at least as he resumed walking, but just as he rounded the corner a loud klaxon sounded from the room at the end of the hall. Turning around quickly, the man made his way to the door and cast the spell required to open it. Sure enough, it was the pedestal's alarm, as loud as he had ever heard it. On the pedestal stood a glass ball on a short round brass stand. A myriad of colors swirled within, and right in front of it was a brass plaque for identification of whom the prophecy was about and from whom it was made. As he walked over to the pedestal he looked down at the plaque, reading the message etched there:

LL to XL 01 JUL 96

Sirius Black

Harry James Potter

James Potter

Lily Potter (nee' Evans)

The Keeper stood there for a few moments to mull over this situation. Before he got very far however the door behind him opened again and another man in a grey hooded cloak stepped in, as well as a man in a grey hooded cloak that was let down. The un-hooded man walked over and glanced at the first line and nearly fainted from shock.

"Close your mouth, you'll attract flies," The second hooded man chuckled, breaking the silence in the room. "LL to XL. Luna Lovegood to Xenophilius Lovegood, July 1, 1996 . . . Well, that explains why Croaker's trying to swallow the room. Then again, we knew she was

a Seer.” Looking down the list of names, he blinked a couple of times. “This just keeps getting weirder and weirder.”

Croaker had just managed to close his mouth and was about to address his two compatriots when another alarm sounded. This one came from the rotating room that served as the foyer for the “publicly accessible” part of the Department of Mysteries. What caught everyone’s attention as there was only one room accessible from there with that kind of alarm. The three men turned on their heels and quickly ran from the high-security room back to the spinning room. As they arrived, they noticed a door opened that was /never/ even unlocked, much less open. Nor were the three men alone. Inside the spinning room stood a total of eight people in grey Unspeakable cloaks, the last one having just entered and shutting the Locked Door behind him. But what was strangest of all, at least in the lead Unspeakable’s mind, was that he didn’t recognize ANY of the badges on these people, nor any of their code names.

“Excuse me,” the one of the entering trio who was obviously in charge announced as he pointed a wand at the assembled group, “Who are you and how did you get into that room?” Croaker and the other Unspeakable drew their wands at this point as well, covering the speaker against a room full of people.

Normally an Unspeakable’s cloak has a charm on it to allow another person to see the face through the hood, should that person be allowed to either by the wearer of the cloak, or by the Head Officers of the Unspeakables. But when what appeared by gait to be a young, very confident man came forward, the hood would not reveal who it was. The man’s badge read, Charlemagne, Leader Team Gamma. The power rankings were maxed out, and by the code along the bottom of the badge he seemed most adept in Battle Magic. But the badge did not need to even be considered for power ratings, for it was obvious just being around him that this young man was much more powerful than the average Wizard. This gave the Unspeakable in Charge a cause for concern until he noticed the young man was holding an envelope and a shrunken and lightened box in his hand.

“I know you don’t know me,” said the young man’s baritone voice, “But I am Team Leader Charlemagne, and those five are the rest of

my team. The other two are the objectives we were sent after,” he explained, motioning to each group as he spoke of them. “I would explain more as to who they are, but there’s another emergency that you need to know about, Code Violet.”

This got the Head Unspeakable’s sole attention as he absently took both the envelope and the box. Emergency codes were based upon the color spectrum, but unlike their muggle counterparts the least emergent of the codes was black, followed by red. They increased until White was reached. In the entire history of the Department of Mysteries there had only ever been one Code White, and that was during the Grindelwald years when he attempted to invade the DOM by massive force. While Code White called for the immediate assembly and action by every single Unspeakable in the entire department, Code Violet was almost the same level save that it called for immediate use of one or more Unspeakables, no questions asked. There had been only a few in the History of the Unspeakables, mainly those times when action was required or the entire Wizarding World would collapse. Nodding at once, he looked at the Team Leader and stood aside to let him to go on.

Instead of explaining what was going on, he turned toward the group and started to give orders, “Sun Tsu, Selene, you go to the Lovegood residence and pick up Ms. Lovegood. Bring her back here, but remember, she can see through these things without permission. And then go to the Granger residence and pick up Ms. Granger. Remember her parents won’t be happy to see you.” Two figures nodded and moved at once, as if they were either related or knew each other very well. “Phoebe, Athena, I need you to go to the Longbottom residence, and collect Mr. Longbottom. Mrs. Longbottom will be reticent, but you can tell her it has to deal with the reason he was in the Department of Mysteries. I will collect Mr. And Miss Weasley after I get our most dire case back here. Liber, you head to the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office and speak with Mr. Weasley. Tell him we’ll need to talk with him at home. If he’s not there, wait for me outside the Burrow. Raptor, Firebrand, I need you to stay here and organize a triage. One of the people we’ll be bringing back will be in very bad shape. Don’t answer any questions until I’m back with the Weasley.”

Everyone else nodded, but the first two to break off paused at the door. "Charlie," the shorter female cautioned, "You might want to let Athena and Raptor come with you. I know the situation, but you'll need help at your first stop, and numbers will help you deal with Mrs. Weasley as well, even if Mr. Weasley is there." She spoke as if she knew exactly what she was talking about, which caused a pause in the Team Leader's thoughts.

The two stared at each other for a moment as if communicating on some unknown level, then Charlemagne nodded once. "Very well. Raptor, Athena, you're with me. Phoebe, I think you can handle the Longbottoms by yourself, just remember Ms. Augusta can be a bit . . . formal. Firebrand, you know the drill, I'll leave you here as before. Okay team, let's move." With this the team left the circular room out the correct door, moving pretty fast.

Croaker, having been an Unspeakable for ages, gave Firebrand a thoroughly appraising look before saying, "Firebrand, I knew someone with that code name. I wasn't aware we reused code names so soon . . . " If the statement was meant as a question, the last remaining Gamma Team member didn't answer. Instead she looked toward a couple of others that had entered during the lobby during the commotion and started to give out orders.

Headmaster's Office

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Albus Dumbledore eased himself into the chair of his office and allowed himself a chance to relax. This had been a good year for him. Not a great one, considering he had to spend part of his time in that damnable Shrieking Shack hiding from Fudge, but a good one just the same. Nearly everything went according to plan, though some things not quite in the way that he expected. Still, you couldn't make an omelette without breaking some eggs, right?

First, he successfully put a wedge between the members of the Golden Trio. Oh, it wasn't a big one, but there was one and they didn't even notice it! His plan to keep Mr. Weasley and Ms. Granger from writing Mr. Potter worked perfectly. Naturally Mr. Potter would

see the lack of information as a betrayal. It was only human to think along those lines, and despite the brat's annoying habit to get himself out of tight situations time and time again, he was still only human. This would put some doubts in the head of the so-called "Chosen One" about his closest friends, doubts that the Headmaster would indeed encourage. The Boy-Who-Lived was getting a bit too comfortable, a bit too reliant upon the other two for Dumbledore's tastes. No, it was better that the Trio were split and held at arm's length from Mr. Potter at best, merely tolerated preferable.

To this end he would impose the same letter writing ban as last year for the first part of Summer. But the Potter boy would not know of it. No, that would not do. Instead he'd plant some tidbits of information about the other two growing closer to each other, and inform Harry of another, safer, route for letters to be passed amongst them. Not that the other two would know about THAT. No, that would not do at all. Maybe he could find a way to let the Weasley girl contact Potter. It was time to start steering them together anyway. After all, after the Weasley girl's possession, it would be a simple matter to control her thoughts, thus steering them in the directions he saw fit. That would be best. Dumbledore was tiring of being in the spotlight, and it almost seemed inevitable that Potter would rise even higher. So his best bet was to be the power behind the throne. Let Potter take the reins as it were, but control where the boy would steer.

To this end, he'd need the boy to be pliable. The grandfatherly image was a good start, but not quite good enough. Especially after Black's death. Now there was an unexpected boon. No, he didn't want the man killed. Instead he had hoped that Black would do something rash and get himself caught again. Then he could rush in and convince Fudge not to give the Marauder the kiss. He'd have to go back to prison of course. Too bad, but that was unfortunately unavoidable. But that would cement his position in Potter's heart. But no, Black had to get himself killed. At first the old man cursed the younger for his rampant stupidity. But after sleeping on the destruction of his office for a night he realized things couldn't have gone better. Now with the boy broken like he was, all Albus had to do was wait until Harry was good and tenderized at his relative's home, then rush in and take the boy away from them, for good.

Yes, this would be the last summer the young wizard would have to spend at the Dursley residence. Oh, he toyed of making the boy go back until he was 17, but that had a couple of Major flaws to it. First was Petunia Dursley. She was of course a squib, as was all the Evans's except for Lily. But unlike most squibs, the Evans's were taught everything about the Wizarding World, for the family at one time was a major go-between family between their world and the muggle world. They provided the link that allowed for raw materials and even some production processing for clothing, food and the like. That focus had been shifted to another family when Lily was discovered to be a witch. After all it would have been far too easy for the young witch to discover some of the well-hidden secrets of the Evans lines now. So, the Jacobsons moved in and took over the Evans role, and for the first time in several centuries this caused the children of Evans House to be treated like they were supposed to. Petunia resented the change, and resented being a squib, causing a major rift between sisters. So when Lily Potter nee' Evans died, and Albus needed a place to put young Harry, Petunia made the old man give an oath that as soon as Potter was considered an adult that the Headmaster would remove "the freak." And as if that wasn't bad enough, the bitter woman also knew that Mr. Potter would become Lord Potter on his 16th birthday, that being when the law required that the Heir of a deceased Head of House take their place as Head. This granted immediate emancipation as well, something that could not be avoided.

Some would say that the best way to handle that would be to keep the boy in the dark and refuse to let him go anywhere near the Ministry or the goblins. But Dumbledore knew that to be a bad move. First it was Wizarding Law, and there were far too many people interested in the boy for that to work. Not to mention the rather horrendous backlash if/when the boy discovered the truth. Even more so, since if he was right, young Mr. Potter was about to become the head of the Black Family as well. That was the second flaw to any plans of keeping him there for another summer. If anyone truly found out what life was like there . . .

Dumbledore was shaken out of his reverie by a bright pulse and violent rattling from his desk. Opening a secret drawer, he glanced at the monitoring objects within. Two of them were alarming rather

loudly. First was health monitor on the boy. This one had been most helpful through the years, but the alarm now was rather unexpected. It was darkening quickly, meaning that Potter was near death. This combined with the monitor of the wards on Privet drive which showed that they had collapsed caused the Headmaster to go very pale. Standing up immediately he looked over to the portraits. "Please have Professor McGonagall meet me at the front gates immediately. Tell her young Mr. Potter is in trouble." Then after thinking a moment he sent a patronus toward Privet Drive telling the guards there to wait for his arrival before entering the house. After this he turned and left, hoping that he would not be too late.

Number 4 Privet Drive

Little Whinging, Surrey

Petunia's POV

The Boy Who Lived was in serious trouble. He had just lapsed into unconsciousness, though that did not stop the rain of blows pouring over his body. Petunia had stood by with a look on her face reminiscent of having a piece of dung under her nose, watching without protest. She was not egging her husband and her son on, but at the same time she wasn't about to stop them. In truth, she hated her nephew as much as Vernon did, but lacked the courage to do anything to him personally. Instead, she satisfied herself with watching her family kill the freak. She would help with disposal later. Not that she would apparently have to wait much longer, as the young wizard's breathing became more ragged and hollow with each passing moment. She quietly cheered that her time with the freakish part of her family would be at an end very soon.

But alas, such a release was not meant to be hers as three almost simultaneous "pops" were heard in the sparse bedroom upstairs. But Petunia had barely enough time to look up before the door swung open hard, slamming into the wall it was attached to. This sudden noise was enough to give the two males a start, which had left them paused in their beating of the young boy. Two red beams of light shot down the stairs, catching them both in the chest and launching them back into the corner near the front door. A loud, authoritative voice

echoed from upstairs after the beams of light saying, "Department of Magical Law Enforcement. DO NOT MOVE!"

"Out of my house!" Petunia shrieked as she started forward, only to find a wand in her face. She had not seen the person in the grey hooded cloak come down the stairs, so his rapid appearance succeeded in startling her thoroughly. She, of anyone here other than her nephew, knew the most of the Wizarding World so she understood from the stance the person in front of her that she would be severely hexed if she even thought of moving. Out of the corner of her eyes she caught another two grey-cloaked figures moving, one toward the front door and one toward her nephew. "You have no right to interfere . . ." her next words died on her lips as the wand held against her was thrust violently right in between her eyes, causing her to stagger back.

"I have every right to interfere in an attempted murder. We could add child abuse and Muggle Assault on a Wizarding Minor as well, Ms. Dursley," the man facing her growled out. She could tell the man in front of her was angry, very much so. He also sounded a little familiar to her, but she couldn't quite place the sounds. Either way, she knew she was in trouble, though her pride would not let her let it rest. "He's just an abnormal freak. Good riddance to bad rubbish." She quickly found out that this was the wrong thing to say however as a red light flashed in front of her, sending her back into a wall. Suddenly she was bound, and when she tried to speak next she found no sound coming from her at all. Frantically she looked over toward her husband, as if seeking aid.

But aid would not be forthcoming from that area either. The small table next to her front door was demolished, as was the vase on it. The glass of the window panes next to the door were also broken, and the wall next to the door was also showing signs of severe breakage. Her mind didn't even register the sounds of them being thrown into the wall and door again while she was confronting the man with the wand trained on her, but apparently they received the same treatment she did. She became scared for the first time as the man that was supposed to protect her was as much at the mercy of these freaks as she was. And her son was hurt, adding to her horror. Who would do such a thing to her Dudders? How could these people

defend the worthless freak and assault good honest people? Fear only spurred her loathing even further, though she felt utterly powerless at the moment. Then she remembered seeing a third shape. Absolutely terrified of having another freak demolishing her home, she looked around hurriedly to find the third person bent over her nephew. This was simply too much for the woman as she started to rage against her bonds, trying to get free to either finish the job of her husband and son or to rescue said family. The two men covering the muggles switched places, and the one who appeared to be in charge stood before her.

“Ostendo sum mihi ut Petunia Dursley,” she heard the voice from the man above her whisper. Afraid that he cast some kind of spell on her, she looked up in time to see the face of the leader. She was deeply shocked into silence as the man leaned over to come a few inches from her face. “You had better hope Mr. Potter forgets all about you, Mrs. Dursley. Or your life will not be worth one pence. And make no mistake, he WILL survive this. If Voldemort cannot kill him, what makes you think slime like you could even aspire to such feats?” Those last words were followed by another flash of bright light then darkness.

Athena's POV

Watching Charlemagne enter this house after all that he had been through was both fascinating and very worrying. She knew her leader knew what they would find, but she didn't know how he would take it. The man had been through so much already, and to go through this now was going to be a test of sorts. How well will he handle this? Would he kill the Dursley's? What would happen when Dumbledore showed up? That confrontation would be unavoidable, as much as confronting the family here was. How good or bad would things go. The future was very cloudy at this point, and only time would tell.

First things first though, to get down there. They arrived in young Mr. Potters room, only to find it full of boxes and the door locked. It looked like the Dursley's had used the place as storage during the school year, and had replaced the door. The door looked new with four new locks, and no cat door. Interesting, she would have thought there would be one there. After all she heard, she would have

expected it. Still, the door was locked and time was of the essence. So as Raptor and Charlie were both struck dumb by the decor of this room (though for different reasons), Athena decided to open the door. At the same time she wanted to make a statement, so she used Expelliarmus instead of Alohamora. The door was nearly blasted off of its hinges, swinging wide to hit the wall beside it. This not only caused what was happening downstairs to stop, but it alerted the only other person down there that was conscious that things were different now.

The two men went out into the hallway and started downstairs first, firing silent expelliarmus's as they went. Athena could tell whatever they saw angered them, though their faces seemed a curious contrast of emotions considering they actually looked a lot alike. Raptor's face seemed to contain an anger that she only usually saw in Charlemagne's face, one of such bottomless rage as to be absolutely terrifying to whoever he looked to that way. Not that his targets could tell of that expression underneath those hoods, but it promised a slow, painful death to the people below. Charlemagne, on the other hand, seemed angered, but at the same time haunted. Of course Athena knew full well why the haunted look was there, but this was no time to say anything about it. Both of the men had already moved into the hallway and down the stairs, leaving Athena to catch up.

As she hit the bottom of the stairs she came to a near sudden stop. Quickly she had to suppress the urge to throw up, followed by another urge to punish the muggles present for the unforgivable atrocities they committed upon their victim. The young man was broken, almost laterally as he laid there bent forward at a nearly impossible angle half-way down the back. His neck was almost hanging limply as blood poured out of his ears, nose, and mouth. Both legs had compound fractures in several places, and each arm seemed to have two more. Already the body was bloating from internal bleeding, and his face looked nearly crushed. "Habitum in vita," she said aloud. Instantly the body froze and all blood stopped flowing as time ceased to exist as far as Harry Potter was concerned. Ignoring the almost spitting rage of Raptor and the cold, calculated rage of Charlie, she instead took out a small silver box and placed it on the ground beside the body. Pressing the top of the box with her

wand, she watched as several thin metal cables reached out and attached themselves to the body. Once they were attached, the box glowed a faint red and paused. Only then did she breath a sigh of relief, only to have it fall as she heard Charlemagne cast the Ostendo charm. She looked up to see Charlie get in the older woman's face, snarling with such anger as to be palpable in the room. After he said his piece she watched as he pointed his wand at her and stun her. She let go of a breath she wasn't even aware she was holding in hopes he wouldn't kill her outright.

Just then there were two pops out in the front yard indicating someone had apparated here. Raptor's head snapped to the door, followed by his touching his eyeglasses for a moment. Athena did not need him to say another word as to who was out there though. From the look on the man's face there could only be one person it could be. Dumbledore. "We need to go," Athena said quietly but insistently. "The old man can wait, but Harry cannot. He's in stasis, but I dare not hold it forever." She sincerely hoped that her words would penetrate her companion's rage-filled heads, for she did not want to have to deal with keeping them alive s well as Harry Potter.

Raptor glared in the door so hard it could have erupted in flames. But Athena's words apparently won true as he nodded. "Charlie," the man said quietly, " We need to get out of here before . . . " Just then a familiar tingle seemed to come from their chests. "Damn, anti-app wards are up. Can I take care of the Great Betrayer, please?" Raptor's face looked absolutely vicious but at the same time hopefully innocent which came across as promising great violence and death.

Charlie wasn't fooled for a moment though and shook his head. "No, I'll keep them busy, you break through the wards. We leave in one minute, make it quick." Not stopping to watch Raptor pull out a silver tube, Charlie marched to the door and threw it open. A reddish stunning bolt flashed against a shield from one of his devices as he raised his wand. Firing four stunners of his own caused two distinct THUMPS on the ground, indicating that only two were strong enough to block them. "Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Freeze!" Athena moved out further into the hallway to both cover Raptor and watch what was happening outside.

Outside, in a straight line to the doorway stood Albus Dumbledore and Nymphadora Tonks, those being the only two who's shields could take the stunners. Dumbledore looked back at them in shock, obviously expecting anything else but what he was seeing. She saw the headmaster reach up and slide his half-moon glasses up to his eyes, only for his eyes to widen even more as he realized the obscurity spells on the cloaks could not be circumvented. Knowing full well he couldn't let them take Harry Potter out of there, he decided to try his position card first. "I'm Albus Dumbledore, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot. I'm here for my magical dependent, Harry Potter. You have no authority to keep me from him. Stand aside, or be guilty of kidnapping."

A mirthless chuckle echoed out from under Charlie's cloak while his wand pointed directly at the Headmaster. "You are not his Magical Guardian, old man. That was Sirius Black, to be followed by Remus Lupin, or Amelia Bones. Of course, the head of the DMLE doesn't know about that, does she? Or, didn't at any rate. Either way, Mr. Potter is severely injured from the people you've illegally placed him with. He requires immediate medical attention or he won't live the next hour. As a member of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, I order you to lower your anti-apparition wards or be guilty of being an accomplice to Murder of a WIZARDING Youth, child abuse, and aggravated assault of a WIZARDING Youth via Muggles."

Dumbledore paled at the insinuation that the austere head of the DMLE now knew of her role, but quickly hid it as he responded, "He is unsafe at the Ministry or St. Mungoes. We will take him to Madame Pomfrey, who is more than capable of handling the injuries that Mr. Potter has obtained. I'm sure he's not as bad off as you say . . . " He was interrupted by what sounded like a crash of a complete set of china. A bright blue light flashed as the wards fell, followed by three sharp cracks. The only person left was the man in the grey cloak, who even the Headmaster could tell was smirking, even if he couldn't see the face. "Halt! You're "

That was as far as the old man got before finding a wand pressed against his forehead. "Even the Chief of the Wizengamot is held under the laws of the land, Dumbledore," the man's voice hissed from under the hood. "Heed this well, you have committed your last illegal

act against Harry Potter. He will not be returning to Hogwarts in the fall, and when you next see him . . . Well, I'd wish mercy on your black soul, but I don't think there will be any." With this the man in grey apparated away, leaving a stunned man and Auror gaping at the house. Police sirens soon were heard from a block away, headed in their direction.

Longbottom Manor

Near Blackpool, Lancashire

Neville was nervous as his Gran picked him up at King's Cross. The fact she looked more formal and uptight than usual did not bode well for her reactions when they managed to get home. In fact he briefly entertained the notion of trying to get the Weasley's to hang around a bit longer at the station, but Mr. Weasley's participation in the quelling of Harry's Uncle put paid to that idea. And even if that hadn't, the fact that Augusta was all but politely dragging Neville along did nothing to make him believe he could hope to stave off his Gran's lecture any longer than she wanted it to. She did pause to watch the spectacle with Harry's Uncle though, long enough to shake her head in disgust. "They are obviously not doing any good," she said tritely but softly. "I have half a mind . . . " Looking down and her grandson cut that off however. Neville knew then he was in for it.

As they arrived home from the station, the Longbottom Regent snapped her fingers to summon a House Elf. "Toby, take Master Longbottom's chest into his suite," not even waiting for a reply from the elf, she turned her head to the side so she could glance at him. "Master Longbottom, follow me into the sitting room." With this she strode off, leaving Neville to follow. Quickly he brought everything to mind that happened this year. The DA, Umbridge, the Inquisitorial Squad, and finally the Department of Mysteries ran through his mind. As he finally arrived in the sitting room, he decided the best way to handle this would be to stand for his actions as a Head of House would, with confidence and conviction. He would show his Gran the new side of her Grandson, the side that would not leave a friend to face danger by himself. The kind of man that fulfilled all obligations, especially those of friendship and alliance.

--Flashback--

It was the last DA meeting before the Christmas hols, and Neville Longbottom was tired, but satisfied. Harry was a good teacher, patient, caring, charismatic, and honest. Neville had been watching Harry through this, and while he did not want to be in his friend's shoes, he definitely wanted to be more like him. He was tired of feeling inferior to his own family, just as he was tired of being a disappointment to his Grandmother. For once, he'd like to do something that would make his parents proud of him. He had no doubts they would all be pleased to have Harry as the Longbottom, so with this in mind he had made a promise to himself earlier this year to study his friend closely, so that he could learn how to be more . . . well, like Harry.

But he knew that the one of the fastest ways to alienate Harry was to be like the fan boys and girls out there. He knew that the moment he started to watch Harry too much he'd find himself pushed just a bit further away. Not that Harry would ever give up on him. That wasn't Harry's way. No, he'd just draw Ron and Hermione closer to him to act as a buffer. Rather than alienate the raven-haired youth, he decided that today he'd ask Harry straight out for some pointers, and hopefully bring himself closer to the Golden Trio. With this in mind, he walked up to the Heir of the Potter Family and waited for him to wave the next group on. Then he cleared his throat and spoke formally, "Harry James Potter, Heir to the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter, I, Neville Longbottom, Heir to the Noble House of Longbottom would respectfully beg a boon of you."

This stopped the Boy-Who-Lived, as well as the other two of the Trio dead in their tracks. Hermione looked like a fish out of water, and Ron looked like someone hit him on the back of the head with a board. Harry stared straight ahead with an expression similar to Hermione's as all concentration was lost. Not surprisingly Ron was the first to recover from the shock of Neville's formality, and deftly plucked the piece of parchment that Harry was holding out of his hands. "Go on mate. He's being formal for a reason, and you'd do better finding out what he wants." Neville had to find Harry's expression rather comical as he turned around to look at him, but Neville did not break his erect posture or serious manner. To do otherwise would be a severe insult,

something Gran would make sure he never lived down. Ron pushed Harry toward Neville, who turned on his heels and walked to the far side of the room.

After the first few steps he could hear footsteps behind him, as well as Hermione asking Ron what that was about. Ron told her he'd explain it to them later, but right now they had to worry about clearing the room. This suited Neville just fine, because it allowed him to focus on what he wanted from Harry. As they reached the corner of the room he pulled his wand and tried a couple of Silencio's before turning toward Harry. Harry's expression had changed from gobsmacked to calculating in the time they had walked over here, and grew even more leery with the spells. Finally Neville turned toward to face Harry as he summoned up every last ounce of courage he had. "I apologize for being so formal, but I have a big favor to ask of you, one I would not feel right asking any other way than as one Heir to another."

Harry blinked for a moment in confusion, then asked, "Okay, but what is this Most Ancient and Noble stuff, Neville? I don't know anything about the Potters being a house like that. I've only ever heard one house referred to like that, and that was not a family I'd like to emulate." He looked disgusted at the last comment, making Neville wonder what family he was talking about.

Neville shrugged it off though and smiled at his friend. "I don't know what family that is, Harry, but the Potters had earned the title of "Most Ancient and Noble" a long time ago, and they were always a good Light family." With this he started thinking and finally said, albeit slightly more timidly than before, "Harry, I had asked you over her because I want to learn from you." Harry was shocked, but didn't say a word so as to allow Neville to continue. "Harry, you may not have noticed, but I'm not the most self-confident person in the world. Thing is, I've watched you for years now, and while there are things your rather self-conscious about, overall when the chips come down you exude confidence like you were some military leader. I . . . I want to learn that confidence from you. I think it would go a long way to help me in my Magic, and also in other matters. I was going to offer you anything you want in return, including a familial debt, but I think I can do one better. If you agree to help me, I'll help you with the traditions

of the Pureblood Houses and what I know of the Potter house. What do you say?"

Harry started to blush slightly halfway through this and looked down at his feet. When Neville finally stopped, he simply said, "I don't know that I could teach you all that much in that area Neville . . ."

Neville shook his head and brought his hand up to Harry's shoulder in a rather friendly way before replying, "I know you want to be "Just Harry," but I don't think that's going to be possible for you. Not for the reason you think," he said the last part hurriedly to avoid Harry's temper, "But because even when this whole upcoming war is over, you'll still have an estate and a House to run. Even without your unwanted fame, that would put you in the spotlight, Harry. But . . . maybe I can show you a way to meet all of that so that you can be yourself? After all, you will be the Head of House Potter. YOU set the tone for the house, no one else. I can teach you the traditions so you can do what you want, and you can help me improve my confidence."

Harry Potter was apparently conflicted, and ran his hand through his hair before looking up at Neville again and saying, "Nev, you'll be a target. You know that right? You're associating yourself with me, and trouble seems to find me with alarming regularity. You sure you want to do this?"

Neville was pretty much at ease at this point, as Harry hadn't dismissed the idea out of hand. So it was with a little confidence that he answered, "Yes. I really don't want to go into why, but I'm already a target. I'll stand by you Harry, if you'll have me."

The conversation was brought to an end by waving down their attention. After the spells were dropped Neville learned it was his turn, and Harry told him he'd think about it. Over the holidays his parents were divulged to the Trio, and they didn't try to coddle him or blame him. Harry agreed to help him soon after the Holidays, which soon turned beneficial to both of them.

--End Flashback--

“Sit down, Master Longbottom,” Augusta Longbottom said both stiffly and formally. Neville had a decision to make, and for once decided to base it upon his Gran’s actions. When it was evident she was not going to sit, he stood straighter and shook his head. The Regent was not too happy with this response, and mistook it for childishness. “Mister Longbottom, I told you to sit down. This defiance of me will not help you further, and I thought I taught you better than this.”

The words would have been stinging sharp had Neville not been prepared for this. Standing up even straighter, he looked Augusta in the eye and said, “Madame Longbottom, I would prefer this discussion be handled with a bit of decorum. I know why you wish to speak to me, and I also know you likely do not have all the facts of the matter. I would request, before any lectures take place, that we sit down and I tell you what happened. Then, if you think I have done anything that disgraces House Longbottom, I will be willing to take whatever punishment you wish to bestow. But as Heir to House Longbottom I was operating both under obligation to a Most Ancient and Noble House, and as a friend to someone who really needed my help. It was with those two undeniable obligations, as Heir, that I had done what I did.”

For a moment or two it looked like his Gran was either going to explode or slump into a chair from shock. Never had Neville talked to his Grandmother like this, and never had he looked so confident. It didn’t matter that Neville’s stomach was flip-flopping inside. He knew he had to keep the outward confidence up. And he knew he was right. Like Harry said, confidence came from knowing you are right and sticking to your guns. As long as you do not blind yourself, being right will give you the strength you need to handle any number of tense situations.

Finally it appeared as the shock won, and Augusta managed to lower herself into a chair, followed closely by Neville. Both sat straight and proper. Augusta broke the silence first with a nod. “Okay, Master Longbottom, let me hear from you what had happened.”

With this statement, Neville launched into the long story of what happened during the school year, the build-up to all of it, and finally tot he DOM experience itself. He carefully watched his grandmother’s

expressions during this, though except for a couple of places he found it rather hard to avoid slipping in either concern or pride. Finally he wound down and looked directly into the older woman's eyes, also something he'd never done before. "Gran, I owed Harry for what he has done and taught me over the year. I learned more in that time with the DA than I had learnt in all four years previous combined. That alone would be enough for me to risk my life to help him. I also have noticed he has the weight of the world on his shoulders, and a madman that seems to really want to kill him. For honor's sake, I could do nothing else. I'd like to think my parents would be proud of me."

He had her right up until that last point, though the rebuke was comparatively mild. "Why would you care what they might think, you made it clear you are ashamed of them over the Christmas Holidays."

Hearing this, Neville stood up and did something else he had never done before, he rebuked his grandmother. Standing straight, he replied, "No, I do not feel ashamed of my parents. You never asked why no-one knows about them, at least from me. The reason is not shame as you think, but more because I do not wish the others to pity me. I don't want that to be an excuse as to why some things are the way they are. I do not want them to think that I would even /consider/ using that as excuse. I won't break under the weight of what they think, nor will I let my parents insanity get me down. I don't talk about it because it is none of their business, and is not germane to how good or poorly I do at anything."

It became apparent after a few minutes of shock that Augusta believed him, for a slight smile grew upon her face. "Sit down Neville," she said softly. "I apologize for my jumping to conclusions on this matter. Of course your parents would be proud of you. Especially with that last argument. Mister Potter appears to have been really good for you." Calling upon a house elf, she asked for some tea and biscuits for both of them. She appeared to relax more, which set Neville at ease. "So what did these "confidence lessons" entail?" she asked.

That question was never to be answered however, for right at that moment the family house elf returned. "Mistress, there is a person at the door, demanding to speak with you about an important matter.

Toby is uncertain about his visitor, for Toby cannot see her face. She is wearing a badge though. It is reading Phoebe, and that is the only name she is giving.” At this announcement August Longbottom pulls her wand and looks to Neville. “Stay here, Master Longbottom. If a fight breaks out, floo to your uncle Algernon’s house.”

“But Gran . . . “

“No,” the older woman snaps as she heads to the door, “You do not have a wand, Neville. If necessary, go to Algernon’s and call for help from there. We will have to go get you a wand of your own from Mr. Ollivander soon enough.”

It was a long ten minutes wait, but it appeared that he didn’t need to evacuate. At one point during that ten minutes he almost did floo off as the discussion near the entrance of the Manor became heated, but it quieted down rather quickly. Shortly thereafter his grandmother entered again, followed by someone in grey robes. The person’s face was concealed, and Neville noted the badge Toby mentioned. He became bewildered, wondering what was going on when the cloaked person came right up to Neville, who started to stand.

“Neville Longbottom, Heir to the Noble House of Longbottom?” the stranger asked in a voice that sounded both familiar and unfamiliar at the same time.

“Yes.”

“I am Phoebe, and I represent the Department of Mysteries. In regards to the incident in our department a couple of weeks ago, we are requesting that all six children come in to be debriefed. Although I realize the lateness of this, I must insist you come now. There is a problem arising from your visit to our department that requires your urgent attention. You are not in trouble, but your presence is needed. Will you come?”

Neville looked at his grandmother as if asking an opinion, to which she nodded that he should go. Neville wasn’t convinced though, and asked, “Why so urgent, after two weeks? Why now?”

Phoebe's head moved a little, as if she was raising up to look him in the eyes. "Because the situation that precipitates this summons has just now happened. It involves one Mr. Harry James Potter. To be succinct, Mister Longbottom, he needs you. Please, get your trunk and follow me."

Neville didn't particularly need to hear anymore, and wasn't about to waste time asking why he needed his trunk. "Must be those muggles," he spat, shaking his head. "I've got to go Gran. I'll be back when I can." As the last words were spoken he called Toby and asked for his trunk. Once it was brought, Phoebe shrank it and handed it to Neville to put away. Together they walked out the door, only barely hearing Augusta's wish that he be careful.

Lovegood House

Ottery St. Catchpole, Devon

Luna had never seen her father like this before. He looked like a cross between a cornered crumple-horned snorkack and a riled bush-dwelling snoot. She knew he was going to be upset, and she ever saw that she'd be in for it when she got home when she made the choice to go to the DOM with Harry. But she really didn't have much of a choice, even if she would have chosen anything else other than going. Harry had quickly become her world this year. For the first time she felt she had friends. For the first time she felt like she belonged. For the first time, she felt she had a refuge from the Ravensclaws, and she would do anything she could to keep that. But as much as she felt the others were friends, she felt something different for two of them, one was easy, and one was difficult.

Harry was the easy one to figure out. She felt the connection between them the first time he placed his hand upon her shoulder, and she knew he did too. In fact, he jumped back when he touched her, as if shocked. But Luna instantly felt a second connection, and needed more time to figure it out. So she blamed it on nargles, then smiled that dreamy smile she used most often. He looked confused for a moment, and she wondered if he'd buy it. But in the end he did, and she was able to go back to practicing. She felt for sure he would've known what that spark was, after all it was fairly well known in the

wizarding world what the signs for bonds. And though soul bonds were fairly rare, wizarding children were told practically birth what the signs were.

And that is where Luna had made her mistake, as she discovered latter. What was well known in the wizarding world as children's stories and lessons were not known at all to Harry. In that way, he might as well been a muggle-born. Once she realized that, she started to try to figure out how to tell him. It would not be easy, especially after he went after Cho Chang. Cho never liked Luna, this is something Luna knew. Luna for the most part ignored her, save she thought the older teenager was partly responsible for her stuff being stolen each year. And if he went with her, then it would be . . . bad. But then he left her to go see Hermione, and Cho was now out of the picture.

Of course, this led to another problem, one she didn't recognize until that interview of Harry's with Rita Skeeter: Hermione. At that interview she accidentally brushed up against the fuzzy-haired witch's arm as she reached for a drink, and she felt that jolt again. That one was easier to pass off, since Harry was at a rather intense part of his story, thus the excuse of nerves. And again, the other person bought it. Only this time Luna knew she wouldn't know what it was, for Hermione was a muggle-born witch. But that began a long, in depth struggle for her. She never considered herself to be attracted toward women. Not that she had anything against lesbians or bisexuals. But the signs were unmistakable. She watched them both closely, trying to figure out how to make this work. For they were both from the Muggle world, and in some ways they were worse there with attitudes when it came to same sex and sharing than the wizarding world was. That was not even counting the fact she knew neither one of them were into much, at least in that way.

So the plan had come down to two things: Watch and Protect. She would watch them, not from afar but closely, and try to find some way to make them all happy. At the same time she let her protective side grow, and woe betide anyone trying to hurt either one of them. So when Harry was almost out of his mind over Stubby Boardman, there was never any doubts. She would go. If he left her behind, she'd follow. Being a Seer had its plus sides, and this one meant she could

not lose him over some silly invisibility cloak. Okay, a not-so-silly invisibility cloak. She would prove she could and would stand by both of them, no matter what.

Although she acquitted herself well, she still considered that trip a failure for two reasons. First, Harry's godfather was dead. She could see the downward spiral he was taking after he came back, and had sincerely hoped that he would be able to pull out of it. But she had this gnawing pit in the middle of her stomach that something was horrendously wrong. So she had been on edge for a while. But what happened to Hermione made it worse. Hermione almost died. HER Hermione almost died. That she didn't was a miracle, one that she thanked Merlin and Morgana for. But this also meant Luna failed. She was on her last nerve right now as a result, and she knew her daddy would soon be jumping down on it, and her.

True to her sight, that's what happened alright. "Luna," Xenophilius said in a part choked and part stern matter. "Come into the living room, we need to talk." Luna sighed and followed along reluctantly. And sure enough, when she sat down her father started with, "I'd like to know just WHAT YOU WERE THINKING?!" This strangled outburst gave way to several minutes of lecture alternating between pleading, yelling, and guilt. Luna was beginning to feel more and more anxious as the minutes passed by, as she felt something squeezing her heart. Finally Xenophilius looked at her and said, "And what I don't get most is why, when I have done my level best to keep you out of this war and safe, you would risk people fully knowing about you for some boy."

At the word boy the bottom dropped out of her world. She began to shake as she saw not the future, but the present. But it was not here she was seeing, but several miles to the south where Harry lived. And she knew his life was in danger, and that he was dying. She felt her heart slow, and saw her father finally look at her. She watched as he went from raging to worried in a blink of an eye, and then watched as he started rushing to her in slow motion. Wave upon wave of pain, fear, and hopelessness washed over her, leaving her feel cold. She was frantic to get to him, no matter what, but she was too far away. Just then, everything stopped, and she heard Fate inside her head.

Unbeknownst to her, her mouth opened as she recited the words she was hearing:

The last true protector of Fate's Child shall fall in the ides of the sixth month. And the beacon shall dim, casting the Child of Fate into darkness. The Children of Time will brave that darkness and send Fate's Chosen forth to free them. And together they shall face the Darkness, for only they can bring light to a dying world. The last true protector . . .

As the world resumed something resembling normalcy she realized she was looking up into the eyes of her father, who seemed to have heard just one thing too much. He was silent though, which she was thankful for since it gave her a chance to answer him. "Daddy, I'm sorry. But Harry and I, as well as one other, are linked by Fate. And he's being pointed by fate to destroy Riddle. I can't leave them alone. Not to do this. Yes, it will mean that Riddle may discover me a Seer close to Harry, but I'll have to take that chance. As it is..." At this another wave of cold, numbing darkness flowed through her, making her world once again slow to a crawl. But this time there was a faint hope as she spewed yet another prophecy. This one she could not remember though, and as she came out of it she heard a knock on the front door. Her father obviously used this time to try to focus his senses as he walked to the door and opened it. There, standing on the other side of the door were a pair of Unspeakables, cloaks and all.

Luna found it interesting that she could see under their hoods, but her father could not. After a brief discussion they were let in, and the female of the two walked up to her and hugged her. This floored the others in the room, at least enough to get Luna to smile when she saw her face. 'Oh this is too good,' she thought to herself. As she separated from the Unspeakable she smiles a small, knowing smile and asked deliberately, "What do I call you?"

The male of the two stepped forward and nodded. "I am Sun Tsu and this is Selene. You are Luna Lovegood and this is your father Xenophilius Lovegood." Nodding to his partner, he let her continue.

"Something has come up within the past hour that requires the attention of the Ministry Six, as you six are being called," she says

carefully. "It has to do with your excursion into the Department of Mysteries. Unfortunately, you may be required to be gone for a couple of weeks," Turning to look at Xenophilius, she continued in a soft but re-assuring voice, "I promise you she will be well looked after, and she will be away from this war for a while. She will be as safe as we can make her."

Xenophilius looked very torn, something Luna could read easily on her face. But she knew that he trusted her, and trusted her judgement in the end. Indeed, before these two came in, it was looking like he finally accepted what had happened. So instantly making the decision that felt like she could get to Harry the quickest, she turned and started for the foyer. "Daddy, I don't think this is something we can ignore. I'm sorry, but I need to go." She could tell her father was about to object, so she changed directions and went over to kiss him on the cheek. "I'll be careful, but I have to go." With this she gave him a hug and started to head out to her trunk. "See you in a couple of weeks Daddy!" The two unspeakables and Luna headed out of the door, and as soon as they were past the House Wards, they apparated away.

Granger Residence

Outskirts of London

Hermione Granger took a deep breath and let it out slowly as she closed the door to her room. Her parents were happy to see her when she got into the station, but she was unprepared for the vehemence of their arguments when they got home. Apparently the Headmaster had written them, telling them /everything/ that happened. This had spawned a brief but fierce debate as to why Hermione hadn't told them about Voldemort or any of the other less-than-pleasant facts about the Wizarding World. It had finally ended not that long ago with an ultimatum:

--Flashback--

Hermione was about to pull her hair out in exasperation after hearing her father demand she stop seeing Harry. The fact both of them were looking at her expecting her agreement to this was in a way very

aggravating to her. So she stood up tall and looked her father in the eyes as he gave the response that she privately knew he did not want. "Father, I love you and I will always be your daughter, but you cannot tell me who I can and cannot be friends with when you are over half the country away from me." Taking another deep breath and letting it out slowly, she looked at them for a moment. "Harry Potter is very important to me. More than you know. He does not go looking for trouble, instead it seems to find him with a startling regularity, even when he tries to avoid it. Yes, he's a primary target for this terrorist, but what you need to understand is that I'm /safer/ with him than without. Because with him at least I have someone who will not only watch my back, but will go to hell and back to rescue me. Without him, I'm a muggle-born and target for every death eater out there. More so since they know who I am already. I can't run, they'd just find me. So I refuse to run. I will fight for my right to live, and your rights to live. I'm sorry if this does not meet with what you want."

She looked between both her mother and father for some time, waiting for a response. She could tell she didn't quite get through to them by the hard glare from her father. Finally he spoke, low and angry, "Hermione, do not pretend for one moment you know what it is like to fight for your rights. You have never been in the military, I have. I also happen to know that most wizards don't know the "muggle" world at all, and thus would be easy to spot. We are going into hiding, whether you like it or not. I would rather have your cooperation than not, but whether or not you come with us is not an option. Maybe you're right about Mister Potter. But if you are, then he'll win this war. At that time we'll consider letting you go back. In the meantime, I want you to go to your room and think hard about what you will or will not do."

Hermione closed her eyes for a moment to hold back the tears, then shook her head. "Dad, in September I turn 17, which is the age of adulthood in the wizarding world. I beg you to reconsider this" Something in her mind screamed at her to stop, so she took that.

"Reconsider this?" her father asked dangerously.

"I don't know yet," she said with a sigh. "I'm going to my room to think about things, and what's happening. I'm sorry I disappointed you."

With this she ran up to her room, not turning around when she heard the calls for her to come back.

--End Flashback--

She was shaken out of her reverie by the distinctive pops of apparition in the back yard. Drawing her wand, she looked outside and blinked for a moment. Two people in grey robes, and one student. 'Luna Lovegood? What is she doing here, and who are they?' She started to make her way to the door when she heard her father stepping out the back. She couldn't make out exactly what was being said, but he didn't sound happy. So she sped up, hoping to avoid an incident.

As she hit the bottom of the steps she saw a flash of red light in the dining area. This caused her to slow down and start to walk toward the kitchen as stealthily as she could, hoping to catch someone off-guard. Glancing around the corner she saw her mother sitting in a chair wrapped in ropes and her father unconscious on the floor. She moved a little more to see what she could glance and almost ran into Luna. This startled the bushy-haired witch enough to make her jump back and level her wand at her. "Stand and identify."

Luna for the most part seemed uncaring that there was a wand pointed directly at her face. Instead she smiled and said, "Hermione, it's so good to see you up and about. It's me, Luna." The blond girl seemed very happy, and not quite as out of it as usual.

This of course caused Hermione to suspect her more, so she asked, "What unusual event happened in the Three Broomsticks and what did you later attribute it to?"

Luna's smile took on a dreamy quality at that memory as she looked very happy. "I brushed against your arm with my hand, and we both got shocked. It startled us. Later we attributed it to the tense atmosphere surrounding Harry's story and us being too into it."

Hermione blinked and lowered her wand at the positive identification, then nodded. "Who are they, Luna? And what are we doing here?" For some reason she could not explain she felt happy that Luna was

here, even though she barely knew her. Chocking it up to the stress of the moment she looked at Luna waiting for an answer.

“We’re here to rescue you silly,” Luna replied, her glassy eyes looking up directly into hers. “Unless you want to leave everyone behind that is.” She blushed slightly at this and continued, “Besides, Harry needs u . . . you. These people are from the Department of Mysteries and are willing to take us to him.”

It was as if a switch went off in her head, running upstairs she grabbed her trunk and gave her cat a hug. “I can’t take you with me, but watch over mom and dad, okay?” Somehow she knew that where she was going no animals could go, not even half-breed kneazles. Luna was right behind her and grabbed the other end of her trunk. “They’ll lighten this and shrink it downstairs, right?” Luna nodded at this and together they took her trunk back downstairs.

In the meantime both of her parents were Enervated and tied to their chairs. The Unspeakables were not talking to her parents, but waiting for them. As the girls made it into the kitchen Luna spoke up first. “I already told her what’s going on, so you can save the explanations for later,” she sighed, setting the trunk down when Hermione did. “Hermione, can I talk to your parents for a moment? They’ll help you with the trunk.” When Hermione nodded at her she smiled warmly at her before turning to Hermione’s parents. “Hermione loves you very much. She shows it every day at Hogwarts by the way she talks about you. I would like to think you’ve been a very good set of role models for your daughter. The problem here is that she loves Harry and won’t leave him. I know that you are concerned, and have every right to be. But please, trust in your daughter.”

Hermione caught the last part of that and walked up behind Luna. For some reason she couldn’t even explain she put her hands on the younger girl’s shoulders and smiled sadly at her parents. “Mom, Dad, you taught me to follow my convictions. I can’t leave the world to suffer when I can do something about it. I love you both, and hope you’ll forgive me.” With this she turned back toward the grey cloaked figures and nodded to them, motioning them to lead away. Just as the four apparated away the bindings came off of the Grangers, leaving them home alone.

Mis-use of Muggle Artifacts Office

Head office

Ministry of Magic

London

Arthur Weasley was both very concerned at the same time very proud. His youngest two children had stood up to a dozen death eaters, and with four others managed to fight them to a standstill. It took a while for him to finally understand what they were doing there, but in the end could not fault them for trying to save Sirius's life. At the same time, he could have wished they would have found some other way to do it, even if it was to leave the school and contact him at home. But he was also a realist. Harry would have brooked no further delays, and there was no chance that they'd have listened to them without some decent amount of time having passed. Knowing Harry like he did, and if he was truthful to himself, it was probably the best they could do at the time. He only wished someone could tell Harry that.

Against his better judgement he left Molly with the kids after the train arrived, claiming he had to finish some things here. He knew Ron and Ginny would probably be subjected to an in-person Molly Howler when they got home, but he still was not certain that the time had come to get Molly to let them go. He sighed, signing the last of the paperwork on his desk before pulling out a box from a secret compartment he kept in there. Slowly he traced the Arms on the box, wondering if the time had come for him to divulge what he knew. Once he did, it would likely change the dynamic of his family forever. Or at the very least it would change the way his family acted with others. Not for the first time he wondered about his all-but-officially adopted son and his might-as-well-be daughter. Could they take this news? How would they react to his youngest two?

He had thought to have this talk a year earlier, but he took the same route Dumbledore did. He wanted his children to have a childhood. But lately he had been seeing the cost of that decision, both in the

broken heart of Harry and the life of Sirius. He remembered the words of his father years ago, "Secrecy is a double-edged sword. It both saves and destroys lives. Use it sparingly, but use it well. And if you would walk in the Light, never wait too long to tell the truth." He remembered those words, but unfortunately he failed to apply them. He forgot that his family was supposed to be independent thinkers, giving loyalty only so long as it is earned. He hadn't caught the signs until recently that Dumbledore was losing his worthiness to be followed. He didn't listen to his own sons about Harry, he never questioned why Ginny didn't need help after her first year, and he never questioned the now infamous occlumency lessons with Severus Snape. Even he could see that it would have been worse than useless for Harry to learn that art from the potions professor. He wondered, if not for the first time, if they were serving the right people. But who to hang their hat with? Harry, though it even irked Arthur to say this, was simply too young.

He was pulled out of his thoughts by a knock on the door. "One moment," he called as he set the box on the floor and closed the secret compartment. "Okay." With this the door opened to reveal about the last visitor, short of Harry, that he'd expect here. Nodding once at the Unspeakable in his doorway, he motioned for the person to come in. He watched the person carefully as he closed the door behind him and almost glided to his desk.

"Arthur Weasley, I am Liber. I wish to speak to you of an urgent matter," said the Unspeakable. Yes, he was male by the tone of voice, but like most other Unspeakables, you really couldn't tell who he was underneath the hood.

Motioning to the chair in front of his desk, Arthur smiled and walked around the desk. "What can I do for you?" He felt as if he was being closely scrutinized before he got a response.

"Mr. Weasley, I come to you today with a matter of great import. Today there was a prophecy made about your youngest son and your daughter. This one, due to its nature, must be acted upon soon. I do not wish to alarm you sir, but this could effect the war against Voldemort." The man did not move or fidget, which impressed Arthur. He was about to object when the Unspeakable continued. "This is

considered a high priority, but secret job. They will be kept as safe as we can keep them, and they will be away from the main portions of this war for the time they're doing what needs to be done."

Arthur thought about this for a moment, then looked down at the box on the floor. 'Time to let them go,' he thought to himself. "Liber, let me ask you this: Will they be doing something to counter He-Who Must-Not-Be-Named? Will they be making a contribution to this war, despite their safety?"

Liber looked at the man opposite from him for a few long moments, then gave a small chuckle. "Yes Mr. Weasley. And I guarantee when they're done that they will be ready to give an even larger contribution to the War. What they're going to be doing will be helping Harry Potter in his efforts against Tom Riddle. That's all I can tell you."

Nodding once, Arthur leaned back in the chair and looked at the man in front of him. "Okay, I give permission. They're at my house right now. Shall we?"

"Sure Mister Weasley, though my boss and a couple of others will meet us there. Your wife's temper is legendary."

With this Arthur laughed, stood up and picked up a box. "If your boss is there, I may ask him to witness something for me."

The Burrow

Ottery St. Catchpole

Ron and Ginny both knew as they boarded the Knight Bus that their mother was going to go ballistic when they got home. Ron actually spent some time sitting down and preparing for it. Something his best friends and family would have never thought he would do. But this year saw a growth in the gangly red-head, especially with the aftermath from the Department of Mysteries. That brain thing had put a few things in perspective for him, not only causing him to reflect over the first few years of Hogwarts, but also causing him to look at his motives for his most recent decisions. The one conclusion he came to

more than any other is that he had been going through the motions of being a friend, without actually being one.

For one thing, he'd been horribly jealous over things that no-one had any control over, but he never stood up and tried to do what it took to get the things he wanted. The twins were quickly building wealth, for example. He'd be envious of them, but never wanted to put the effort forth that they most obviously had. Yeah, they got their start-up money from Harry, but if you looked at it this was merely a replacement for what they lost. And in truth Harry was more an investor, the twins would be giving him a portion of their business. Lately he'd been considering that being jealous of this was not worth it, especially considering that he hadn't put the effort forth they obviously had.

This of course led to him not being as good of a friend as he could have been, especially to Hermione and Harry. He had thought that he fancied Hermione for a long while, but upon reflecting upon that he wasn't so sure. He wasn't quite ready to give up on that, but now even he could realize that their constant arguing could not be good. This held especially true as he remember the times he saw Hermione in tears. He had promised himself to start thinking before opening his mouth. That at least would cut down on the arguments. The other side of his friendship problems was Harry. With Harry it was more a matter of lumping him in with his brothers. Ron realized that Harry was more accomplished than he was, or in some ways he could ever be. But Ron could not give up his friendship with Harry, for he genuinely liked his friend. He didn't know what he was going to do yet, other than be there as a true friend rather than someone who went along because there was nothing else to do.

But these reflections were not preparing him for the living howler that he knew was coming. He knew he'd have to stand up to his mother. Sparing a glance to the side he managed to catch his sister's eyes. For a few minutes they looked at each-other, then she nodded once. They both knew the score, knew what was going on. They knew the hell they were about to enter. Silently they agreed that in what was coming Ron would have to take the brunt of things first with Gin backing him up when she could. Just then the bus stopped, and Molly started to haul the family off of the bus.

As they walked into the front door of the Burrow Ron knew that this was not to be an ordinary lecture. For one thing, Bill and Charlie were both there waiting for the group to get home. The twins weren't, but everyone knew they were just a floo call away. Taking a deep breath he sat his trunk down next to the stairs just as he heard his mum order him to. Silently they walked into the livingroom where the rest of the available family joined them. Knowing full well what was coming, he decided to say one thing before his mother began her rant. "Mum, I know what you're wanting to talk about. I would like to say one thing, to make it perfectly clear. I have been reviewing what happened this year in my mind rather closely, and if I had to do it all over again, I wouldn't change a thing. Harry needed us. He couldn't find anyone to tell him that the vision he saw was false, nor did we have time to alert too many people, especially with Umbridge having caught us while we were trying to verify it. Harry is my best friend, and I won't let him down again."

Molly Weasley spun to look at Ron as he spoke, a frown appearing on her face. Nodding once she turned toward Ginny. "Do you have anything to add young lady?"

Ginny took a deep breath then stood tall to face her mother. "Mum, I know you think we're too young, but the fact is that I lost my childhood in my first year. I've already had to deal with some of the worst that you can deal with in this war. I was in V . . . Vo . . . Voldemort's mind." She smiled slightly as everyone but Ron jumped at the name. "I also got away from him. I'm already a target, and refuse to spend my life hiding from him. I . . . care for Harry a lot. But the fact remains I have just as much a stake in this as he does. I will stand beside him, no matter what. You can't keep me from a fight I've been a part of since I first went to Hogwarts."

From the expressions of everyone in the room, save his mother, the tactics they were using floored them. He could tell Bill never thought of things quite like this before, and Charlie's eyes were wet as he looked at his little sister as if seeing her for the first time. But his mum was different, her frown threatened to reach the point of a scowl as she looked between them. "RONALD BILIUS WEASLEY, GINEVRA MOLLY WEASLEY, DON'T YOU USE THAT TONE OF VOICE WITH

ME.” Taking a deep breath she started to continue, “I’m sorry that you feel you have to be in this war, but the fact that He-Who-Must-Not be named is after you does not mean that you have to fight him. In fact, you should be trying to get away from him instead. Save your lives, for no one will thank you for being reckless and getting yourselves killed. What were you thinking?”

Ron scowled at his mother’s words and shook his head. “That if I were going to lose all my family like Harry has, at least I would have tried to save them first. I am a Weasley, and I will not sacrifice my family to live. Don’t ask me to do that mum. Just don’t.” Ginny agreed, adding a few words about she wasn’t being reckless, but that they were not going to back down and hide while others died around them.

This sparked an argument between the two youngest Weasleys and their mother that raged on for the better part of an hour. It would have continued for longer save for sound of the front door opening. Surprised, she jumped and stopped her rant to look toward the front of the house in time to see Arthur step out. “Finally, someone who can talk sense into these two stubborn children,” Molly breathed before taking a breath to inform her husband of what was going on. The older Weasley’s in the house were not-so-privately siding with their siblings at this point, and looked rather indignant at Molly’s last words. But before they could say anything Arthur held his hand up to stop Molly from talking.

Silently he stepped aside to admit four people in grey robes, with their faces obscured. Once everyone was inside Arthur started introductions, “These are people that were never here, they don’t exist. This is Liber, Raptor, and Athena. The gentleman next to me is Charlemagne. They are here for Ron and Ginny. But before they start conducting their business, Charlemagne has agreed to witness something for me. Ronald, please come forward.”

Ron had not known what to make from any of this, and quite frankly he was shocked. So shocked in fact he didn’t recognize his father beckoning him to come forward until Ginny elbowed him in the ribs. Wincing a bit, he stood up and walked to his father, only sparing a glance at the robed man next to him. When Ron was just a step or two from his father he stopped, waiting for whatever was coming.

“Ronald Bilius Weasley, As head of the Ennobled House of Weasley, I hereby give you the keys to your inheritance. What was kept in secret will soon come to light, and the mantle of the youngest sons now passes on to you. So mote it be.”

“So mote it be,” the man standing next to Arthur as the Senior Weasley tapped the box he had handed his son with his wand. Instantly a glow surrounded Ron and the box, causing Ron to feel something settle he had thought was missing from his life. He could only stand there shocked and whisper the appropriate response as it settled.

But Arthur was not done yet. He turned toward his youngest child and smiled.”The Ennobled House of Weasley has a prophecy of its own. This is one I will explain to the rest of the family as well as Ron’s Inheritance. In the meantime the prophecy foretold of a time when the mantle of the youngest sons would be passed to a sixth son with a seventh sibling, the only daughter. Together brother and daughter would take up the fight against the Darkness alongside Gryffindor’s son, and they would bring honor back to a family that had long since lost it.” To say Ginny was shocked would have been an understatement, but their father’s next words would shock them both even more. “These people are here for both of you. Ron, Ginny, go with them now. Go and do what you must. Harry needs you both, and you must face your destiny. Don’t worry about us, we will be here when you return.” One of the cloaked figures smiled, though very few could actually tell she was, but her nod of agreement could not missed.

“ARTHUR WEASLEY, WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU’RE DOING? THEY’RE MUCH TOO YOUNG AND . . .” She got no further than that before Arthur put his hand over his wife’s mouth. Ron could not believe his eyes, and would have stayed for more save the cloaked people started to usher them and their trunks out. The last thing Ron heard as he walked out was his dad telling his mum that it was time to let go. Ron wasn’t sure what was going on, but he felt that whatever was happening was about to change all of their lives forever. He only hoped the changes were for the best.

Chapter 2: Past and Future Planning

“ . . . losing him . . . ”

‘Uh? What’s that?’ Harry thought just before opening his eyes. ‘Or more to the point, who was that?’ Slowly Harry opened his eyes, though after the first second it didn’t do much good. All around him was blackness, as far as he could see, and as far as he could feel. There didn’t seem to be anyone or for that matter anything around him. All was black, and for the life of him he couldn’t feel what he was laying on. ‘Where the . . . ? What happened?’ Closing his eyes again, he tried to calm his rising panic to figure out what happened. Last he remembered he was at the foot of the stairs at his home, being beaten to death by his Uncle and Dudley. Suddenly his body convulsed, as if the memories had triggered yet more damage.

“There’s too much . . . ”

‘There’s too much what?’ he called out as he started to lose his fight with the rising panic in his heart. Slowly the scene around him started to change as platform 9 and 3/4 came into view. Before him stood a train that looked like the Hogwarts Express, but he somehow knew it wasn’t. “What am I doing here?” he asked aloud to no one in particular.

“You’re here to decide wether you’re going to live or die Harry,” a familiar voice answered from just behind him. This caused Harry to jump nearly out of his skin, but years of fighting for his life served him well, or it would have had he had his wand. Instead he landed facing the opposite direction from where he had while his empty hand was pointing at someone who should be dead.

“C . . . Cedric?” he stammered, not quite believing his ears or his eyes. Indeed, standing before him was none other than Cedric Diggory, fellow Tri-Wizard Champion. The tall boy seemed just a little shorter than Harry remembered, although some small part of his brain that sounded a lot like Hermione reminded him that Cedric wasn’t shorter, Harry was taller. “Wha . . . What do you mean?”

The easy-going Hufflepuff laughed warmly at Harry's shock and reached out to grasp the younger boy's shoulder. "Yes, it's me mate. Look, before we go any further, let's get one thing perfectly clear, okay?" Not waiting for Harry's remark, Cedric placed his other hand on Harry's other shoulder and drew the confused boy closer. "You. Did. Not. Kill. Me. It was not your fault. There are three men whose fault it was, and the first two you already know: Barty Crouch Jr. and Tom Morvolo Riddle. You did not tell Tom to AK me, and if you could have you would have saved me. I took that cup of my own accord. I could have just walked away. As to the third, you'll have to figure that one out on your own. Do you understand?" Cedric saw that Harry was about to argue and decided to cut him off with a gentle shake. "Do. You. Understand?" he asked again with a voice that promised a good amount of pain if he didn't receive the answer he was looking for.

It probably was that last that got through to Harry the most, though the pain was something that wasn't a deterrent. Harry could almost feel something relax in himself when the message percolated inside, but before he could answer another voice was heard.

"HARRY!" the voice shouted, followed by an almost murmured, "Please don't go . . . "

Cedric looked back toward an area that looked fuzzy to Harry and smiled warmly. "Well, it sounds like you aren't totally alone back there Harry."

"Back where Cedric?" Harry asked as he tried to find the source of that voice.

Cedric paused for a moment, turning around to look into Harry's eyes as if he were searching for something. "Back in the physical world. Can't you see the crossing?" After getting a perplexed no from Harry he sighed. "Oh Harry, that whale really did a number on you this time, didn't he?" Cedric almost sounded in pain as he said this. Shaking his head, he took Harry's hand and started to lead him away from the

train. Harry couldn't see where they were going at first, but slowly the foggy area started clearing into a black void.

"I . . . I don't want to go there," Harry stalled as he remembered the void he came from. He could almost have sworn he heard Cedric use a few colorful expletives as he dug his heels in to stop the older boy. "I don't like it there."

Cedric's body seemed to wince at those words before the older boy turned around to stare Harry in the eyes. "Harry, it's not your time yet. You have too much to do, and too many years ahead of you." Knowing full well Harry was about to snap off a comment he held up his hand to silence the younger boy before continuing. "I know it's painful back there. And it will be even more so before you're done. But you have friends Harry. You have people who love Just Harry, not the Boy-Who-Lived or any of that. They need you Harry. The world needs you. And Fate won't let you be . . . "

"Damn right she won't let me be," Harry finally snapped. "Never a moment's peace, never any rest. If it's not Dark Lords after me, it's the bloody Ministry. If it's not the Ministry after me, then it's the Dursleys," he snarled before turning to look pleadingly at Cedric "Can't I stay? Can't I go on? I want to see Sirius, my parents, you even. I don't want any more. Fate can pick someone else, can't she? I'm sure Ne . . . "

"Neville can't do it, he's not marked," Cedric interrupted as he pulled Harry into a hug. "Harry, this is why I've been sent here. Fate isn't responsible for about a good 70 percent of what you go through. Her plans were completely different, but mortal free will took over and has been ruining everything. You're not nearly as alone back there as you think. There's people there who care for you, and Fate won't let you be alone against the darkness any longer. You'll have to fight for it, you'll have to work toward it, and you'll have to be more open with your friends, but you won't be alone anymore."

" . . . I love you . . . " the voice called, though it sounded like it was joined by another saying the same thing.

Correctly reading Harry's horror, Cedric shook his head and forced Harry to look in his eyes. "Don't. They won't be any safer, they're all marked. All you'll do is make them and yourself miserable." The older boy took a deep breath and exhaled slowly through his mouth before continuing, "Harry, I promise you now, you won't be alone. Fate has already put plans in the works to get you help, and bring you some of what you want the most in the world. If you can't trust Fate, and from your experiences I know that's asking a lot, then trust me. If you don't go, then you'll regret it, and you know you will. Everyone will die, but they'll be but the first, and most horrific. You don't want that on your conscience for eternity."

Harry stared his friend in the eyes for a short time as if trying to read the man's soul for any deception. All he could find is truth and caring which seemed to flood through him, causing a tear to leak from the corner of the younger boy's eyes. Finally he gave in saying, "Okay Cedric, I believe you. I still have a couple of things to settle with Fate, but those can wait. So how do I get back? I still don't see the crossing."

It was Cedric's turn to look pensive as he responded, "You're not going to like this, but you need to walk back into the void and look for your way back home. Normally it would be easier than that, but it looks like those muggles almost destroyed you. Harry, I'm not allowed to tell you much, but remember this, you won't have much time when you get back. Focus on one thing at a time, and you'll make it." Quickly the older boy enveloped the younger in a hug before pushing him toward the void. "I'll see you later, Harry. Preferably MUCH later."

Just before he stepped in Harry turned around to look at Cedric. "Thank you," he said with an emotional and sincere look on his face. Screwing up his courage, Harry then turned and stepped into the void, causing the world to disappear again.

The voices were louder now, though he still couldn't tell where they were coming from. For a brief moment Harry began to grow concerned that maybe the damage was too severe for him to get back. But then he heard the dual females' voice again.

“Harry, please don’t leave us. I need you. Please.”

“He’s barely holding on, pulse weak, heart rate unstable.”

“Harry!” This time when the female voices spoke a faint flash of light appeared in the distance. At first he thought it was his “eyes” playing tricks on him until the voices came back with, “Please!” He saw it again, brighter and closer. Orienting himself in that direction, he willed himself to move toward the light. He couldn’t tell if he was making progress or not, until the voices returned, this time a bit louder.

“His pulse is getting a little stronger. Blood pressure beginning to stabilize. Magical core fluctuations are down. Keep it up, it’s working.”

This time when the female voices were heard he could tell they were desperate, pleading prayers, and the light looked a lot closer. “Oh yes, please Harry, come back!” Now certain this was where he was supposed to go, he willed himself to get there faster. Then suddenly he hit a wall of pain, and his whole body felt as if it were under the Cruciatus spell, but a hundred times worse.

“His heart just skipped a beat. Set the pain block on its lowest setting and turn it on.” Now Harry could make out the voice of the technical person, at least a little bit. It sounded both familiar and not. He knew it wasn’t anyone he was normally around, and the recognition was vague to say the least. Just as he thought this the pain started to ease slightly, down to about one of Voldemort’s Cruciatuses. This he could handle, so he started to drift closer toward the light that was now calling him with a steady stream of pleading.

“That seems to be working, heart rhythms are now stable. Breath is harsh, but that’s due to lung damage. Once the pulse is strong enough we can start healing . . .”

That was the last thing Harry heard before he drifted into the light. It flashed brightly, and for a moment he saw the room around him before all was black again.

Department of Mysteries

Med Ward
London, England

Three days had passed since Harry Potter was delivered to the department's Med Ward, three long and exhausting days. "Jason," as he was known to the rest of the department was the DOM's head Unspeakable, and with Croaker the public face of the department. And while for the most part this was a good thing, the past three days had been rather bad. Slowly he sipped on some camomile tea as he tried to relax. Croaker sat across the desk from him, also drinking some tea. With them was Saul, the keeper of the prophesies for the department.

If all the pains of the past few days could be summed up in one name, it would be Albus to-many-names-to-say-in-one-breath-much-less-remember Dumbledore. Not even an hour after Charlemagne had come back with Harry Potter and left again for the Weasleys, the Chief Warlock was almost breaking down doors to find Harry Potter. According to him, three Unspeakables identifying themselves as Department of Magical Law Enforcement operatives had broken into Harry Potter's home and abducted him against the wishes of his muggle family. To make matters worse, at least according to Dumbledore, the family seemed to be injured by the same Unspeakables. But they were more concerned for the safety of their relative than for their own problems.

Yes, Jason would believe that one, when Voldemort gave up the Dark Lording business to become a ballerina. While the Boy-Who-Lived's home address and city were pretty much a mystery outside the Department of Magical Correspondence, the fact the boy was raised by abusive muggles was well known, if never proven. Too bad it could have never been proven though, because there were no few Unspeakables, much less aurors, that would have loved to bust them for a great many crimes. Even though it remained to be seen whether or not Vernon Dursley ever hit Harry before, neglect, improper care of injuries, emotional abuse, and unlawful incarceration were considered chargeable offenses in the Wizarding World. And the Headmaster of Hogwarts, who is required by law to notify the authorities when evidence of this type of treatment is suspected, never said anything to anyone. That also was a crime. Add to all of this that he had, until it

was recently proven otherwise, been considered to be the magical guardian of Mister Potter left serious doubts as to whether or not the old man's interest in the younger man was really healthy for the younger man.

But that's where things got interesting. After Charlemagne produced the box of documents for the case he was on, Jason was shocked to discover that Lily and James Potter had left a certified copy of their will with the DOM. The reason it wasn't in the files, and thus no one knew of its existence, had to do with the will being turned over to team Gamma (Charlemagne's team) for safe keeping as they made their trip here. It took Croaker less than a minute to verify it was the real deal, as the yanks would say, then it was opened. Firebrands insisted they pay particularly close attention to the guardianship part. And as Jason read it, he could have sworn Christmas had come early.

Going down the listing of succession for guardianship of one Harry Potter, it was very much obvious that the real magical guardian of Harry Potter was none other than Amelia Bones, head of the DMLE. Jason snagged a team as they were walking by, and told them to politely extend an invitation to the director to join them, immediately. If need be, they were to state it was imperative, for the safety of Magical Britain, that she do so. Then Jason took the time to read the rest of the document and nearly cheered aloud when he got to the end. It was witnessed by Mister APWBD himself. Which meant he knowingly violated the last will of the Potters by placing him where he did. Ms. Bones had entered his office right as that thought processed, causing Jason to smirk. The resulting conversation was lively, with both people smiling like the proverbial cats with the canaries.

Then Dumbledore shows up, demanding Mr. Potter be released to him. It was fun watching the head of the DMLE tearing into the Chief Warlock. The faces the old man adopted would be having Jason smiling for years. Then Jason exerted his authority as head of the DOM to have the old man removed, as well as a warning that Harry Potter was to be left alone by command of his true magical guardian. Amelia asked to see the boy, which a half-hour later resulted in a crying and angry Amelia Bones calling for the heads of the three muggles in question. He was about to send people out for them himself until Raptor stepped in and asked to speak to them for a

moment. After a long talk it was decided to bring them into custody in the muggle world, but not to try them in either one for at least a couple of weeks. Apparently more evidence or something. Shortly afterwards everyone left, and Jason went home to crash into bed.

If Jason had thought his troubles with Dumbledore were over though, he was very much wrong. Indeed they had only begun. That was what the meeting they were about to have with Charlemagne was to be about. Right at that thought there was a rap on the door, which was answered after confirmation as to who was on the other side. The door opened, and Charlemagne entered the room. The new unspeakable never took his hood down, and with the exceptions of Jason and Charlemagne's team, no one knew of the young man's true identity. Jason was sure he only knew because it would be impossible for team Gamma to move around if he didn't. He supposed that the knowledge he had should put his mind at ease, but when he read through the rest of the file he grew a little nervous. This man was going to stir the proverbial hornet's nest before he was done.

Shaking his head to clear his thoughts, he put a thin smile on his face. "Charlemagne, please have a seat. You know Croaker and Saul, right?" At the team leader's nod he decided to get right to the first point. "I don't know what you intended when you confronted Dumbledore, but a part of me would like to thank you while a part of me would like to strangle you. You do realize you've mixed things up quite well, don't you? He came in here shortly after I informed Amelia of her status, and she really tore into him. He didn't appreciate that. He's now trying to bring the Wizengamot to bear on us, and trying to get Mr. Potter declared a national secret, and through that he can get him away from Amelia. What does Firebrand say about him?"

Charlie looked at the wall behind Jason for a moment, then chuckled. "Old bastard is really pulling out the stops, isn't he? And because Mister Potter is a minor, he could technically pull it off to. Bad thing is, for him anyway, he doesn't work off the fly well. He'll have to explain why he's a national secret, at least in closed session. And we all know there are Dark Supporters on the council. I'm betting he's trying to use his standing to declare the reason top secret, and thus use his position as "The Leader of the Light" to avoid that. We could do one of two things here. First have Amelia demand the reason for this in

open council. She'll stick to her guns enough to force him to either declare it in closed session or back down entirely. Or we could use the threat of exposing it ourselves to shut him down. The threat of a lot of probing questions into the whys of his actions is something he does not want, for his answers would not stand up to the light of day. The question becomes which way do we use?"

Jason leaned back for a moment. The file box he received had quite a few eye-openers within, but he had a sneaking hunch that Charlemagne had even more than he shared. It was obvious to him that the young man had a plan, and that somehow he was missing something important about it. But at the same time he knew that getting that information out of him would prove rather difficult due to the young man's trust issues. Jason was just now beginning to remember some things he had long since forgotten, and not for the first time he wondered just how strong the young man could be, emotionally and magically. Finally he decided upon the middle road, at least for the moment. "Why don't we go with the first for the moment, hold the second in reserve? There are things you need to accomplish first, right?"

Croaker and Saul both looked rather confused at that statement, and they both looked at the other as if each was questioning the other if they knew any more. Croaker cleared his throat before cutting in, "I understand Dumbledore has done some bad things, and that he is interfering where he shouldn't. But I get the feeling you aren't planning to simply reduce his power base. What do you two know that I don't, and what things are you looking to do?" Saul nodded slowly in agreement, his eyes riveted to where Charlemagne's would be if the older man could see him.

Charlemagne looked more amused than anything else at that question than angered or concerned. "There's a lot that many people don't know," the younger man started. "Unfortunately most of it is time sensitive information." He paused for a moment as if thinking something before continuing, "Time sensitive. As if that's something I'll ever take for granted again. Let's just say Fumbledark is not as Light as a lot of people think. There's a lot he's done over the century and a half he's been alive, and much of it has had not been so good. In the end, if we want to have a future, we'll have to neutralize his

influence. It's for "the greater good" after all." One could almost hear the quotes around the phrase. And one could definitely hear the derision in which he said the phrase as if it were a loud brass band.

Jason nods at those words then arches a brow. "You still didn't answer the question. What does Firebrand say about young Harry? His defense would be a lot easier if he were awake to aid in it. We could use his testimony about those muggles after all."

"It will be some years before he's ready to talk about any of that. But don't worry, you'll have the information soon enough." Jason had raised his eyebrows at the first comment, then chuckled as the second part came out. Charlemagne looked rather amused but continued. "Firebrand has told me he'll make a full recovery, though by all odds he should be dead. He's magically drained however, since he subconsciously used it all to fix the major issues, including the broken neck. The artifacts she is using to heal the rest of the injuries are repairing the rest of his body, but it still takes magic. From what I understand, the drain should subside sometime this afternoon. Then she'll place a focus stone on his chest, which should charge his core in 24 to 36 hours. He hasn't regained consciousness yet, but according to both Firebrand and Selene, that should remedy itself in another 18 to 20 hours. Athena agrees with that assessment. When he finally awakens, we'll need both prophecies that Ms. Lovegood gave to her father, as well as Amelia's presence. Have you managed to get the parents and guardians of everyone but Mr. Potter to sign off on the forms yet?"

Jason winced at the question he knew would be asked. It had not been easy to get some of those signatures. At first he thought Mrs. Weasley would demand her children came home when he explained things. But Arthur simply nodded and signed the forms which effectively cut Molly off mid-rant. Indeed, she was so shocked that he didn't even try to argue that she automatically signed all the forms without even realizing she had done so until the last one was out of her hands. Jason left in a hurry at that point. No sense in taking unnecessary flak when he could avoid it. "Yes, everyone but Amelia signed. She wants to talk to Mr. Potter first, with you and your team present. She's not going to be easy to convince you know."

Charlemagne laughed loudly for just a moment before turning serious again. "Don't I know it. But I think that Mr. Potter and myself can make her see the light. It might require a few moments alone, but it should be possible. The fate of the entire wizarding world depends on them being able to participate in this mission after all. And that is something Amelia will definitely understand. Speaking of which, I know Phoebe has started guiding Ms Granger's arithmancy studies, but what about the others. How's their training going?"

Croaker, who volunteered to be in charge of this aspect, spoke up, "With the exception of Ms. Lovegood, Ms. Weasley, and Ms. Granger, they are all on a slow review session right now, combined with some gap filling. Everyone is being instructed in potions, to at least get their theoretical studies up. Mr. Weasley, for some reason unknown to everyone but Ms. Weasley, has turned to History and has started to study the Founder's era with an almost single-minded intensity. His friends are convinced there's something wrong, for he had absolutely hated history before and was far from a model student in school. But no one is saying anything to him yet. Ms. Granger you already covered, and the two youngest women of the group are getting an intensive session in all the subjects they took at Hogwarts to catch them up with the later years. The rest of it is waiting for Mr. Potter to wake up and join them."

Now Jason knew Charlemagne knew more than what was in the files, for the younger man actually grinned knowingly at the revelation about Mr. Weasley. But apparently he was not saying a word about what he knew however, "I imagine he would. But it is good they're going for a review, for they'll need it when they start their mission. Mr. Potter will need lessons in politics, though he won't want them. He needs to learn how to work within the Wizengamot for example. And Mr. Weasley has a good idea about history. They'll all need refresher courses in the first Voldemort war as well as the Founder's era. Ms. Granger will need both politics and Wizarding customs . . . and come to think of it Mr. Potter will as well. She is a first generation witch, and he was raised in muggle society without the slightest inkling of the customs, beliefs, and lessons that all children raised in the Wizarding world have. He doesn't even know the children's fairy tales, and those few that do cross the Wizard/Muggle line he only knows very

sanitized versions. And of course, they'll all need Defense of and Dark arts training normally given to Unspeakables."

"Why don't we go all the way and give them the complete Unspeakable course while we're at it?" Croaker asked just a bit sarcastically.

"Actually, that's what the forms we were having the parents sign were for. Well most of them anyway," Jason interjected. "Every teenager in there, with the exception of Harry Potter, are now emancipated minors and have been conditionally enrolled as field unspeakables. The condition being their acceptance of the jobs, of course." Jason couldn't help but to laugh at Croaker's fish-out-of-water routine. It wasn't often Croaker was stunned speechless. "Let's face it Croaker, whether or not you want to protect at least one of them, they're at the front of this war, and have been for a long time. None of them are about to leave Mr. Potter, and he's you-know-who's primary target. They'll need all the training they can get, even if they don't work for us after he's gone."

"But we don't have years to train them," Croaker objected. "Especially with the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot after us. How will we get that done?"

"Well Croaker, I have a plan," Charlemagne stated. "Here's what we're going to do . . . "With this he began a discussion of what needed to be done.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry
Headmaster's office
Scotland

Hedwig stood outside the window of the Headmasters office as she had been doing for days. Many people considered her a smart bird, but they didn't know just how smart. Hedwig was, as most people suspected, her master's familiar. As a familiar her intelligence and her abilities were tied into the power of her master. The more powerful the master, the higher the intelligence and more numerous and powerful the familiar's abilities were. Thus her intelligence was equal

to some of the more intelligent magical creatures: phoenixes, hippogriffs, gryphons, etc. When she felt her master in danger, she was ready to fight for him, but he ordered her off. She flew off toward Hogwarts, but not to get the old wizard. She never really liked the old man, and every time she was in his presence she felt as if there was something very wrong. Instead she was seeking the phoenix that resided there in hopes that he could help her master.

At least that was her hope until she arrived at the headmaster's window. The headmaster was thinking aloud about his plans for her Master, and they weren't anything good. Her Master had few enough friends as it was, and he was threatening removing them. As she stood there just out of sight and listened, she learned that the lurch during her flight had been when her Master was taken away from that bad place by some others. This confused her for she still felt as if her Master had been doubled. She felt two bonds, both different and yet alike. One had been near death for a while, and indeed had nearly died. The other was stronger, though at first he flickered slightly during the worst of the death feelings, he was a stabilizing factor for her. Now things were better, though the amount of power she was having to handle was staggering.

But none of this effected her current mission: to get help for her Master. She knew he'd need someone that could help him with all of his problems, both the physical and the emotional. And the best being to help him was a phoenix. But how to get to Fawkes without facing the old man? Every time the old man left, she tried to sweep in and talk to him, but there was a barrier that prevented her from entering through the windows and the door. At first she didn't understand it, as she had been able to get in there before, but after the second day of trying she saw him point his wand toward the window where she was. At first she nearly panicked because she thought he noticed her, but that wasn't the case. The spell hit the top of the window and the office shimmered. A bright gold light shown around the window, and Hedwig could feel the barrier snap into place. It was then she made the connection that it was there when he was gone, not there otherwise.

That was a day ago, and Hedwig was both anxious and slightly depressed. She needed to get in there soon, but she could not get

through the wards. She felt the drain on her Master end, which started to increase her available power. But all the available power in the world would not help her because she could not cast a spell to break the barrier. It was not an ability of an owl. But he needed Fawkes, especially when he awoke. The fact she couldn't even communicate through the barrier with the phoenix only increased her frustration. Not for the first time shook her head violently, silently wishing her Master could help her. And even if the old man could hear her, she couldn't very well ask for permission to get through the barrier, even if she had a letter. That would be asking for him to capture her. With her Master missing, she knew he wouldn't think twice about keeping her prisoner to get him back.

Suddenly the fireplace flared to life, roaring in a green flame. She saw a head in the flames as it told the old man something. He responded by getting up and striding over to the fireplace. A toss of powder into the flames and he was gone. Hedwig blinked her big eyes once, then twice before hopping toward the center of the windowsill. She couldn't believe her luck, the barrier wasn't there. He hadn't erected it! Barking once, she hopped into the air and landed on the headmaster's desk. Hedwig hopped from one leg to the other excitedly, trying to communicate her need to the phoenix sitting on the stand before her.

Fawkes rose his head and looked into the owl's eyes and seemed to discern what she needed in the span of a couple of seconds and let out a mournful cry. Hedwig couldn't believe what he heard and started barking and hissing for a good minute. The phoenix listened sadly, then looked down at the stand and giving another sorrowful note. Hedwig's gaze followed the phoenix's and paused as she saw the magic emanating from the stand. She blinked a couple of times before lifting her head and looking Fawkes in the eyes. Her magic expanded as she traced both her bonds and the bonds forced upon her. What she saw made her very angry. Phoenixes were the royalty of the avian world, and for someone to bind one like this one was bound was a sacrilege of the highest order. Now she was both frustrated and angry, as well as a little defeated.

But before she could do more than ponder what could be done she felt another welling of power from her "other Master" as well as flash

of magic from her true master. She flapped her wings and took off into the air, raising her to the same height as the phoenix. A golden aura surrounded the owl, quickly filling the room with a golden light. A sickly green light surrounded Fawkes and the stand, but the golden light was stronger. Slowly the green light started to dim, and Fawkes cried out in pain. A thick gold beam thrust out of Hedwig and hit the green aura. A loud CRACK echoed throughout the chamber, and the green light fell. This was followed by a victorious cry from Fawkes as the gold light died. Hedwig fell heavily to the table, twitching violently. Fawkes winged over to the fallen owl and gently grabbed her with his talons. She stopped twitching as she was gently lifted in the air. A moment later both birds disappeared in a flash of flame which destroyed the stand completely.

Department of Mysteries
Medical Ward
London, England

Luna had been sitting by Harry's bed for a couple of hours now, holding one of his hands as she waited for him. Across the bed from her sat Hermione, who was holding his other hand. The two witches had been sitting vigil since shortly after Firebrand and Selene finished their emergency healing. Next to the death of her mother, that had been the most horrific point of her life. No one could keep her from the room, and only Hermione could keep her from running up to the bed while they were working on him. Together they stood next to a wall and prayed, crying as they watched the black-haired boy start to slip away. While she didn't know what Hermione felt, she felt like her soul was being torn apart. All she could do is sit there and beg for Harry to stay. When Firebrand said that they were losing him she turned into Hermione's body and sobbed silently. The two girls sat there, clutching each other as the unspeakables worked hard to save his life, and all she could do is sit there and pray to Harry. He and Hermione were her life now, and she was losing an important part of it. Hermione seemed to be clutching her more in desperation, but at that point Luna was taking anything she could get.

Then Firebrand announced his pulse and heartbeat were returning. While Luna couldn't register what that meant at first, Hermione's body jumped excitedly. Luna looked up into the chocolate eyes of her

friend and for the first time saw the hope within. Hermione looked down into Luna's blue eyes and mouthed, "He's coming back." Luna's heart leapt to her throat as she turned toward the body. Frantically she called again to Harry, hoping to see life return to that form. She was ecstatic when his eyes snapped open and wildly searched the area. She saw them fall on the both of them and summoned all the love she felt for the boy into hers. Then he passed out, and the world threatened to fall out from under her. Selene looked over to the two girls and told them in a comforting voice that he was going to be okay. Ron and Neville stepped in with Athena and sent to collect her and Hermione. At first they protested, but then Athena had cut them off chiding them about taking care of themselves. Slumping at that point, the boys picked them up and carried them out.

After they had a nap the unspeakables had called the group into a training room and explained the Harry's situation to them all. They didn't just explain things about his injuries and his recovery from them, but they also explained about his living situation and what had happened over the years. It was a given that the Ministry six were livid and shocked by what they learned, but what surprised the other five was how Luna stood up and drew her wand. Slowly she walked up to Charlemagne, who had been narrating all of it, and hugged him. Then she looked straight into his eyes and asked quietly if she could be taken to Surrey. Her voice was not sad or dreamy, but almost hard with determination. Charlemagne tried to talk to her, but for once Luna was not going to listen. Shaking her head to deny the older woman, she looked to Charlie and asked again. Then Athena stepped forward and bent over to look into Luna's eyes. For the first time Luna recognized who she was seeing and jumped slightly in shock. She still remembered what the woman said.

-- Flashback--

"I know they deserve everything you want to do, but you can't. Harry won't like it, and besides, you need to be there for Hermione," Athena whispered into her ear. "You're more needed here. Let the law take care of them for the moment. Besides, while they made their choice to treat him that way, there's someone else just as responsible. Focus on your loved ones. They'll need you."

“But . . . “ Luna replied, a thousand statements she could make buried in that one word.

“It’s unavoidable, really,” the unspeakable commented dreamily, “Don’t let the wrackspurts in over it though.”

--Flashback end --

Luna had let herself be talked out of it at that point, but she stuck to Hermione like glue, and together they only left Harry’s side to sleep, personal needs, and to go to the training sessions they couldn’t do at his bedside. They took shifts as much as possible on all of these times, rather insistent that at least one of them be there in case he woke. There was no progress in the relationship between her and Hermione, but truth be told Luna wasn’t pushing for it while Harry was like this. Not only would it not be fair to Harry, but when you’re as worried as the two young witches were, it was not a good time to work on establish any kind of romantic relationship. At least Hermione let her inside her walls a little. Luna would be happy with that.

Ronald had been rather vocal about making Harry’s relatives pay when he first found out, his famous temper showing. Ginny looked like she was going to either kill someone or break into hysteria. Neville was . . . Well, he was Neville. Neville had always been one to soldier on no matter what happened. Oh, things bothered him and he was saddened and angry with what he heard, but he seemed to be the strong support column of the group. He was no Harry by any stretch, but his way of moving forward and preparing for when Harry woke inspired everyone. If not for him, everyone else would have been a wreck and nothing would have gotten done. It was him that convinced the others that they needed to do this training, especially after the Unspeakables laid down the plan for the two youngest girls to condense another year’s of education into a month. After that month they would take their OWL’s, then join the older group in Year Six. Ginny nodded and Luna looked toward her female soul mate for a moment. The other girl nodded with a slight smile on her face, and offered to help. Luna gladly accepted this and promised to do both her and Hermione proud. Hermione sadly seemed to miss the meaning behind the statement.

That was almost four days ago, and it had been a busy four days. Most times that Luna and Hermione would sit with Harry, they would take turns focusing and talking to him while the other studied. Indeed, last night they both fell asleep beside his bed, only to wake up the next morning to find themselves in plush comfortable chairs with blankets draped over them. Their books had been set aside with their pages marked. No one had questioned it by that point.

Oh, at first Ron tried to drag Hermione away, which served no other purpose than to cause one of their famous rows. But in a very short time, comparatively speaking, the row stopped and Ron nodded. He slipped over to Harry's bed and talked for a few minutes, typical boy stuff about assuring him everything was going to be okay and that he should come back. Afterward he stood up and asked them both to take care of themselves before he left them both shocked and dumbfounded. They turned and looked at each other for a few long moments before shrugging and saying good night to Harry. Ron over the next few days started to throw himself into History, which almost caused Hermione to faint. She at one point demanded his true identity, for it was just that far out of character. If Luna were to say anything, she would have had to have agreed with Hermione. But Ron simply smiled a strained smile and explained he had a lot on his mind. Something to do with what his father had given him before they left. This confused the two witches so they asked Ginny, and got nowhere but being told calmly but firmly to stay out. So they went to Neville.

Neville pulled Ginny aside one night to ask Ginny, mentioning that he was also growing concerned. For some reason Ginny wasn't as adamant about not saying anything to him as she had been with them, but he still didn't get much. Apparently they (Ron and Ginny) had found something out about their family. Something no one had ever suspected and few would believe. That was it. She would say nothing else, and quickly changed the subject. Ginny also grew introspective, but she coped by throwing herself into her books. Neville had told them this, and recommended that they give the brother and sister room to be for a little bit. Luna and Hermione both were very intrigued with this, but in the end curbed their curiosity and agreed. Instead they watched the siblings and vowed to help them if they asked for it.

Luna's most uncomfortable time during this time was the first time Amelia Bones entered the room after the surgery. Luna at first didn't understand as the older witch walked up to the bed and kissed Harry's forehead. She looked like she wanted to take his hand, but Luna wasn't going to let go. This awoke the curiosity of Madam Bones, especially when she looked over at Hermione and noticed she also wasn't going to let go. For a while though she didn't say anything, instead contenting herself with touching Harry's shoulder and talking to him quietly. Luna was confused when Amelia promised him that she would take care of him, and that she would support whatever he wanted to do.

There was more talk along those lines, ending with a promise to bring Susan by the next time she came. As Amelia stood to leave however, she asked Luna to walk her out. Once they got out of earshot the older woman pulled her into an empty room and demanded to know what was going on with her, Harry, and Hermione. Luna grew scared for a moment, and asked why she wanted to know. Amelia looked into her eyes for a moment and then explained that she was Harry's Magical Guardian. That set Luna's rage off, but before the younger witch could say anything more the older woman explained she just found out about it after Harry was brought here. As Luna's temper cooled back down, the teenager then began to explain about the bonds and both Harry and Hermione. What followed was an intense question and answer session delivered by Amelia. But at the end the older witch was satisfied and actually hugged Luna. Being worn out as she was, Luna accepted this gratefully and made plans to get them all through this. Luna then returned to her two loves and sat quietly after telling Hermione she would explain later.

"Luna?" a feminine voice questioned, bringing her out of her thoughts. Luna looked up into the deep brown orbs of Hermione and smiled. "Yes ho... Hermione?" she smiled at the older witch and as per usual offered silent comfort.

"You said you'd explain what Madam Bones wanted with you. What happened?" Hermione asked almost as if she had felt Luna think about that.

Luna blushed and ducked her head for a moment as she tried to get over her embarrassment. Hermione reached over subconsciously and touched Luna's hand, which seemed to redden the blond girl's cheek even more. Forging on anyway, she looked up and said, "She wanted to know about the relationships Harry was in," she started speaking quietly. "More importantly, what you and I were to Harry."

"Why?" she spurted, then paused and visibly tried to regain her decorum. "I mean, what did you tell her?"

Luna blushed again, and found it easier to answer the first question as it was presented. "Because she's Harry's real Magical Guardian, apparently." Raising her hand to stop Hermione from verbalizing her rather indignant and enraged response, she continued, "She only found out about the same time we were pulled from our homes. If she had known before then, she would have definitely worked to get him away from those disgusting people."

Hermione appeared mollified by those words, and pushed on. "What did you tell her? What is she going to do now?"

Luna looked back to Harry and sighed, "It looks like our promise to Harry will be kept. The Dursleys are in muggle prison, and Amelia is taking over guardianship duties." She looked back down to her lap, then sighed again before looking up to Hermione. "I told her you were one of his best friends, and I told her what he meant to me. I also tried . . ." What she had tried went unsaid as a low masculine moan suddenly echoed the room. Luna jumped before looking down to see Harry's eyes open and looking at her.

"Lu . . . L . . . Luna?" he asked as if unsure. His eyes turned toward Hermione and he blinked when he followed her arm down to see her holding his hand. "M . . . Mi . . . M," he stopped as Hermione pressed a finger to his lips. She was smiling a radiantly beautiful grateful smile as tears rolled freely down her eyes.

"Harry, don't talk yet. Let me get the others," she asked quietly. Luna was overcome with relief herself and didn't notice her cheeks getting wet. When Hermione ran to the door, Luna smiled and

squeezed his hand warmly. "Thank goodness," she said quietly, causing Harry's eyes to dart back to her. "I was . . . I thought we were going to lose you." She then let go of his hand and started to arrange pillows so he could sit up as Firebrand and Selene rushed in. Hermione followed with the rest of the Ministry Six. Charlie and the rest of his team followed soon after, along with Saul.

"Okay, give Firebrand some room to work. You can talk to him in a little bit, I promise," the leader of Gamma team said. "Then we can explain exactly what happened."

Luna quickly obeyed as the two Unspeakables started their tests and started to ask questions. They didn't get too far however when a flash of flame burst in the room, followed by singing. Everyone turned to look at the center of the flash to see Fawkes and an excited Hedwig standing there. Hedwig let go of Fawkes's tail and winged over to perch on Harry's headboard so she could examine her Master closely. Harry could only weakly chuckle as he reached up to scratch his familiar's head. She gently leaned her head into it, her eyes half lidded. Firebrand chuckled warmly and continued her work. Fawkes, in the meantime, was being guarded by the Ministry Six. Finally Harry spoke up as Neville started forward to catch the phoenix. "Leave him alone. He's away from the Headmaster and no longer under his control."

"How do you know that Harry?" Neville asked, stopping his forward progress but still keeping his wand on the bird.

"Hedwig told me," Harry replied. "Don't ask me how, but she did."

Before anyone could say anything else, Jason came in and froze. Suddenly his wand was in his hand and a stupify spell flashed toward the phoenix. The bird fell to the floor before anyone could say anything. But before another move could be made, Charlemagne spoke up. "Don't. He's clean of the old bastard."

Jason gave the team leader an indignant look, then put his wand away after instructing Neville to make the bird comfortable. "Madam

Bones has been notified, and she's on her way, after she makes a quick detour."

Harry almost panicked at this, looking toward Firebrand and then sighed. "How much trouble am I in?" he asked resignedly.

"Quite a bit, but not from the DMLE young man," a no-nonsense feminine voice rang out from the door. Luna looked toward the door with everyone else to see Amelia and Susan standing there.

Susan dashed into the room and ran up to where Luna and Hermione were. She pulled them into a hug that greatly surprised everyone but Amelia and whispered into the pair's ears, "Thank you for looking after my cousin. I'm sure things will work out." Then she released the gobsmacked pair of witches and smiled at them.

Amelia chuckled and strode into the room, pausing just at the foot of the bed. When Firebrand completed her work and nodded to her, she walked up and stood next to her bed. For the first time that anyone saw other than Susan, the older woman looked rather sad and contrite. "I'm sorry you had to go through all that hell Harry. Your parents' will was sealed and Albus made the decision to put you with those . . . things," Amelia spat the last, causing everyone but Firebrand and Harry to jump with the venom dripping from that word. "But you won't go through it again. I just found out a few days ago that I'm your real Magical Guardian. And I won't let you go back there, unless it is under guard to get your stuff. This I promise."

It was Harry's turn to look gobsmacked as he blinked up to Amelia. "Can . . . can someone explain to me what exactly happened?" he asked tentatively, as if he was unsure if he even wanted to know.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Potter, I will," Charlie said as he strode forward. "I can't tell you my real name, for it is supposed to be confidential to the Department of Mysteries. But my codename is Charlemagne. Most of my colleagues call me Charlie for short. But first," he then looked to Firebrand and asked, "How is he?"

“Weak from laying in bed for so long, and from prolonged magical exhaustion. Physically he’s fully healed. His magical core is recharging, but right now he’s at about level nine.” A few whistles echoed the room from those unspeakables not part of Team Gamma. “A night of actual sleep and he’ll be able to get up and do anything physical he wants. I would recommend another two days with the pendent before he casts spells though.”

Luna looked to the pendent that she had been seeing on him for a while, and finally began to understand just what it was. She smiled and approached Harry with Hermione and Susan in toe. All three of them were conjured chairs to sit in by Charlie, which they took. Amelia conjured her own and took her seat on Harry’s other side.

Charlie nodded once and thanked Firebrand before launching into an explanation of who his team was, and the fact they had just come back from an assignment with knowledge of what was happening, as well as three prophecies involving not only Harry, but the other five of his friends. He then quickly calmed Harry down. “I’ll explain these prophecies in detail to those present, but first I must ask for a Wizard’s or Witch’s oath never to divulge the contents intentionally without the approval of Harry, myself, Raptor, Firebrand, or Amelia. It is to be considered a very tight secret.”

Harry looked confused, and slightly alarmed before he started to look for his wand. “How do you know about the prophecy, and what’s this about another two prophecies?” If he had a wand, he would be pointing it at the unspeakable right then.

Charlie chuckled and shook his head. “I knew you weren’t going to just go along with me,” he said in a highly amused voice. “I wouldn’t either. If I show you how I know, will you agree to not tell anyone else until it is time? I’ll leave the timing up to you, but right now it would cause major problems if anyone else knew other than Ms. Lovegood. She already knows, and how will be apparent soon.” After a moment’s consideration, the younger boy gave a nod. “Ostendo sum mihi ut Harry James Potter.” The members of Team Gamma gasped at the spell, though Jason just nodded his agreement.

Harry flinched at first when the spell was cast, but realized it was cast at the older man himself. When the effects of the spell became apparent and Harry could see who he was talking to, he froze. The younger man's eyes narrowed for a moment, then his face went pale. "How the hell are you," he blurted out in shock.

"Special dispensation, Harry," Charlie cut Harry off before say anymore and give anything else away. After Harry thought about that a moment and became satisfied, he nodded once and indicated that Charlie should go on. Charlie nodded and looked around. "Harry's troubles, at least as far as most people know, began before he was born, when there was a prophecy made about him:

The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches . . . born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies . . . and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not . . . and either must die at the and of the other for neither can live while the other survives . . . The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies . . ." (OOTP (American Hardcover Version), p. 841)

Charlie paused for a moment to let all of that sink in. Luna was saddened for her soul mate, but then began to understand what was happening. She joined the other women near him in a mass-hug, while telling him she was here and would be by his side no matter what. Ron looked pale, and very much concerned for his friend. Ginny looked on in horror, murmuring about the unfairness of life, and Neville grabbed Ginny and held her close as he looked at his friend with support. "You know where I stand, Harry. Nothing has changed."

After a few moments Harry managed to get the women to dis-engage and looked at Neville. "You sure mate? This is as dangerous as it gets. I don't want my friends getting hurt," he said, sounding more and more guilty as he went on. "Sirius . . . he died for this." Firebrand and Raptor both jumped when they heard that, and looked to Charlie for a moment. Charlie nodded and turned back tot he conversation at hand between the young adults, only giving a sign that they'll talk later. After Neville nodded in agreement Harry, and Luna gave his

hand a squeeze, Saul produced two balls and looked at Charlie before handing them to Harry.

“Three days ago, another two prophecies were made. It’s a little known fact that when a Seer makes a prophecy it is recorded instantly in the Hall of Prophecies, as well as information about who they are concerning. Both of these prophecies concern your current situation Harry, and both were made by Ms. Lovegood.” Harry gaped at Luna for a moment, who gave Harry a sad look and started to stand up to walk away, knowing full well he’d reject her. Seers have been making a right mess of his life, and she knew he wouldn’t want one around. At least, that’s what she thought until Harry’s hand found hers and grasped on tight. She was tugged backwards and turned to face Harry. The expression he wore melted her heart, it was full of concern and care. For her. For Loony Luna Lovegood.

“That explains a few things, but it doesn’t make a difference to me,” Harry said quietly but with conviction. “Please stay.”

Luna couldn’t help herself as she broke down and threw herself at him and hugged him tightly. She cried silently on his shoulder for a few minutes before noticing that Harry seemed to be slightly uncomfortable. She sat back but smiled as he still wanted her here. Then she turned her attention to the balls in her hand, and pointed to the one in his right hand. “Break that one first,” she said quietly. He nodded once and then did so. Luna’s voice, strained from prophecy rang out into the room right after he did:

“The last true protector of Fate’s Child shall fall in the ides of the sixth month. And the beacon shall dim, casting the Child of Fate into darkness. The Children of Time will brave that darkness and send Fate’s Chosen forth to free them. And together they shall face the Darkness, for only they can bring light to a dying world. The last true protector . . .”

Harry’s eyes furrowed slightly at this prophecy as the others looked on in confusion. Harry made one connection though, the one that Luna had made. “The last true protector . . . Sirius?”

Luna looked down and then nodded slowly. "It was made only a few days ago, so I had no idea what would happen to him, I'm sorry Harry." She was surprised when Harry squeezed her hand to let her know it was okay.

Charlie cleared his throat again and nodded. "Now this one gives us a clue that you're going to have help in this Harry. I can tell you now the first prophecy did not go the way it was supposed to. You'll need to figure out why, but it appears from that prophesy, as well as the next one you hold, that Fate has decided to help you with this." The last was said in an odd tone of voice that all the people around the unspeakable could only take as "about time she did something."

At Luna's nod, he tossed the second orb to the floor, causing it to break and release it's contents:

"As The Darkness consumes the world, Fate's Child shall stand alone . . . To free the Children of time, the Child of Fate shall call forth his Chosen Few . . . The Founders of the Future shall unite as before, and the Child's Seeress shall join them . . . The Founders of the Future shall join with Fate's Child and confront death itself to free the children of Time . . . Then together the Eight shall banish the Darkness and bring a new Era of Light to the land . . . As the Darkness consumes the world . . ."

"Harry," Charlemagne said, looking to the young man for a moment, "I think it is obvious who Fate's Child is. Your Seeress is also rather obvious. As for the rest, I think you already have ideas as to who they are talking about, right?" The older man said this with conviction as he looked at Harry, waiting for him to respond.

Harry sighed and nodded, looking to Luna for a moment before turning to Amelia. "I don't know what to call you, Madame Bones, so if you could tell me at some point I would like that. In the meantime, I guess I need to ask permission to go do this. I probably won't be gone for long by your perspective, but it will be by mine."

Amelia sat there for a moment, thinking about everything she had heard. She looked in Harry's eyes for a long while, not noticing that

two of the Unspeakables were also looking at him closely. Finally she nods once, though it is obvious she doesn't want him to go. "First, you can call me Amelia, or Aunt Amelia as Susan does," she paused for Harry to look at Susan who smiled supportively at him before continuing. "I can't take the place of your parents, Harry. But I'll be the best guardian I can. And part of that is recognizing when her charge simply must do something. If you think this is a good idea, then I give my permission, for everything."

Charlie nodded at this and cleared his throat. "Harry, what have you figured out so far?"

Harry thought for a moment then says, "Well, I guess I'll have to go back in time, at least according to the prophecies, to rescue the Children of Time. I'm meant to go with my friends, and for some reason we'll be a force to be reckoned with when it is all over. I don't much understand confronting Death, unless they're already dead I need to go prevent that?"

Charlie nodded slowly and then said, "You're very close. The only other clues I have to give you are these: You both know and don't know the Children of Time, and Ms. Granger is working on something to confirm or deny what you're thinking but not saying. From what Phoebe tells me, she will have it figured out within a couple of days. I would recommend you use that time to get well and start your training. Then when she has all the information you need to get started and after you compare notes, we'll use the Locked Room to send you back. In the meantime, Amelia will act as the guardian she is and work to keep you out of Tumbleduck's hands." The group of young adults, with the exception of Harry, gaped at that reference. Charlie waved his hands to stop them from saying anything and countered their thoughts, "Trust me, by the end of this mission you'll all have just about the same respect for the man. I really can't say anything more on that front though. In the meantime, the Department of Mysteries stands ready to help you completely, Harry. Your friends have started training to bring them up to snuff for their O.W.L.'s, especially young Miss Weasley and Ms. Lovegood. We'll send you back as Unspeakables with enough time to complete your studies and sit the O.W.L's again."

“Why?” Ron asked, shocked that he’d have to take them again. “We won’t be there long enough to need them anyways.”

Hermione broke in before Charlie could, a fact that Luna was secretly grateful for. “Honestly Ron, do you think any of us, even Harry, is ready to take on the most powerful Wizard alive? We need training Ron, and we can’t spend time at this time doing it.”

“I really wish you wouldn’t put yourselves in danger too,” Harry said as reflex.

Luna raised a hand and grabbed his cheek to turn his face toward her so she could look him in the eyes. “It’s our choice, Harry. And we would be just as hurt if you died.” Harry’s last bit of resistance died there, and he nodded mutely.

Ginny nodded vehemently, saying, “Where you all go, I go.” She looked at her brother, who bowed his head and murmured a thank you to his sister.

Neville nodded once and said, “We’ll be unspeakables, right?” he asked Charlie who nodded once. Turning to look Harry in the eyes before he spoke again. “I’m in. Harry, you and I share an Heir’s Oath. I’m not backing out of it now. House Longbottom stands behind House Potter. Gran wasn’t happy about it, but she accepted it.”

Harry was able to see the rest of where Charlie was going and nodded. He had a very strong feeling he knew where, or more to the point when he’d go to. After glancing once to Firebrand he looked back to Charlemagne and nodded. “Where do I sign?”

A/N:

First, thank you all for the reviews. I love them! I’ve had one person try to guess the identity of Team Gamma, and hopefully with this chapter I’ve provided some more clues without totally giving it away. I really can’t tell because to me the identities are obvious, but that’s because I know how I picked the names.

And hopefully I've given you all enough reason to understand any OOC'ness out there.

Now for one other thing:

It should be obvious I don't like Dumbledore all that much. In JKR's story I don't think he's evil really, but at best he was culpable for accessory to Child Abuse. Even if it wasn't physical, emotional abuse and neglect is still against the law and Harry should have been removed well before he was 11. Of course I don't know much about British Law, as I'm an American, but in this story the UK has the same laws concerning child abuse that the US does. To me, it is a miracle that Harry turned out the way he did.

Chapter 3: Travels with Fate

Ministry of Magic
Wizengamot Chambers
July 6, 1996

Amelia sat in her chair of office and sighed. Fudge was trying everything he could to keep his office after the revelations about He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named's return. To say that people were livid about the Minister's denials would be an understatement of rather monumental proportions. Because of these denials the Ministry of Magic was caught flat-footed when the truth finally came to light, and had to scramble to play a nasty game of catch up. This did not endear the populace of Magical Britain to the Minister at all. In fact, Fudge's popularity took a sudden nose-dive such that there was no way he could survive a vote of no confidence.

Still, Fudge was in no way a dumb man. Realizing he was in dire political trouble, he started to side heavily with Dumbledore in hopes the Chief Warlock could shelter him from the very storm of anger he created. So far it worked, as attempt after attempt for a vote against the minister died with Dumbledore speaking about "staying true to the course." Amelia almost snorted the first six or seven times she heard this. 'Stay with the incompetent nincompoop rather than put someone with half a brain into office he means.' Where once she would have thought that Dumbledore had some knowledge she did not, and therefore needed Fudge in office, now she knew better. What galled her the most is that she ever took the old man's side on anything. Her faith in the old man was broken when she first saw Harry in the DOM, then shattered when he nearly died. And that was before she saw even the little bit of evidence the Department of Mysteries had on the old coot. Now that she knew some of these details, she privately marveled and at the same time was sickened at how she could have ever been taken in by the old man. But the past mattered not as much as the present, she reminded herself as she forced her attention to Fudge, and now she would not be quieted quite so easily.

"And thus," Fudge finished imperiously, "I hereby wish to ensure the safety of perhaps the most important person in the battles to come: Harry Potter. I move that he be taken into protective custody pursuant

to the McAllen accord of 1847. Young Mister Potter is an important figure in this war, and will be instrumental as we face the terror that is He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.”

“I second this proposal,” Dolores Umbridge announced from her place on Fudge’s right side. She looked too much like the cat that ate the canary, or was it a toad? At first Amelia wondered how she could sit there looking at that, but then she realized Harry could really do her some damage after all she’s done to him. Silencing him would be her first priority. She was, after all, a shark politically. No, it made sense the first thing she’d do is try to silence Harry. After all, she had used the same tactic time and time again in the past with great success. This is part of what made her so dangerous.

It came to no surprise when Dumbledore stood up with a stoic expression on his face. He had fooled the entire council for years with this, but now there were two people who would never be fooled by this again: herself and Madam Longbottom. Both had taken long years to study everyone on the board, and were good at seeing behind the various masks of the people here. Dumbledore looked too happy for her tastes, and she knew he was going to try to run this through with no chance for rebuttal. It was too important a maneuver to allow a chance at failure. “The motion to enact the McAllen accord of 1847, specifically removing Harry Potter from the custody of the Unspeakables and placing him in protective custody has been put forward and seconded. We will now . . . “

Now Amelia stood up and announced, “Objection, Chief Warlock.” Dumbledore’s head snapped toward her, obviously in shock that he’d be interrupted. She smiled as she remembered catching him laying careful groundwork with the other Lords (And Lady) of the Wizengamot. She talked to several of them afterwards, and knew he never provided a reason for this motion. Instead he relied on the “Leader of the Light” image he portrayed to convince people that he knew best. Unfortunately for him she also was known politically as a fair and equitable person, which gave just enough doubt in the minds of the rest to allow her to act. She would be damned if she would let him have his way so easily, and continued before he could interject anything. “So far we’ve heard the history of the Accord, and some wash about how Fudge was wrong about You- . . . never mind.

Voldemort,” she paused for the traditional gasps to be heard at the mention of the name, “being back. But none of that has anything to do with the position of Harry James Potter and whether or not he is safe. The fact is he is with the Unspeakables, who are considered in some ways to be a part of our Law Enforcement. What could be safer than that? Also, and forgive me for sounding cold, but why is protecting the young man such a high priority that you’d remove any chance for him to become an adult until the war is over? Not to mention the sheer manpower involved in security details that the accord mandates?”

Umbridge’s mouth formed a thin line at Amelia’s words, and pre-empted anyone else by speaking next, “Forgive me Lady Bones, but am I understanding that you feel that Mister Potter doesn’t deserve protection? Isn’t that a bit cold?”

“Hardly Madam Umbridge,” Amelia smiled back in a voice was a remarkable imitation the toad woman’s, “There are already safety measures in place for him. He’s in some of the lowest levels of the Ministry, after all. I stated we should trust our people.” From the amount of blinking going on in the room, it was evident not many people had thought about the circumstances that much.

But it was clear that the Chief Warlock had thought of this, and put forth a readily-available answer, “I regrettably must state my belief that our Department of Mysteries has betrayed us.” Dumbledore’s face was outwardly saddened by this, but his eyes held amusement as he played the crowd. Giving the old manipulator his due, he was good working the crowd as was evident by the immediate uproar in the room. Nearly every Lord in the room was on their feet shouting to be heard, and most of them were pale from the implication. Madam Longbottom’s lips disappeared in obvious distaste, but only Amelia knew why.

After a few moments the crowd was called into order by Dumbledore, the damage done. Nothing that Amelia could say at this point would put sufficient doubt into the minds of the other members, but the same could not be said for Augusta Longbottom. She stood up and riveted Dumbledore with a piercing gaze. “And just why would you say that, Chief Warlock? Where is your proof? I would have you know

the Scion of the Noble House of Longbottom is spending some time with them. I have been assured that I could see Master Longbottom any time I wish, and they would not deny me. This does not sound like a bunch of traitors to me. What proof do you have?"

The room looked quieted down as a sense of shock filled the air. Any other time when Dumbledore said someone was dark, or had betrayed the Greater Good, his word was accepted without question. But here was probably one of the most influential houses in the Wizengamot demanding proof for probably the first time ever. This simply was not done!

"Lady Regent, have you actually tried to see your grandson yet?" At the denial from Augusta, Dumbledore moved in for the kill, "Then I'm afraid you'll find yourself in shock madam. I am myself the Magical Guardian for Mr. Potter, and I was absolutely refused access to him. And that was with reports of severe, life threatening injuries that they themselves provided to me, complete with pictures. I can only presume they gave me such "evidence" so to support their story that their muggle relatives had done so. I know these muggles, and while they do not like magic, they would never go that far."

Amelia actually grimaced at the implication Albus was giving out, and decided to put an end to that evidence in a way no one could refute. "Actually Albus, you are not Mr. Potter's Magical Guardian. I am. And for his safety I have asked he be kept from everyone until I could interview him regarding systematic and continued abuse at the hands of his relatives. Regrettably he is still unconscious, so I have not had the chance to talk to him yet. However, the muggle Scotland Yard currently has these relatives in custody, awaiting the Queen's pleasure. She was, last I checked, vehemently against letting them see the light of day." She kept her own occlumency shields up as high as she could now to avoid Albus peering into her mind. She was danced happily on the inside as she saw frustration in the old coot's eyes. Once again, his word and integrity were being subtly questioned.

Of course, the Minister couldn't just let that happen, "Madam Bones, why are you lying about this matter. Everyone knows that the esteemed Chief Warlock assumed Magical Guardianship upon

discovery that no provisions were made in the Potter Will for his care.”

“Actually, I believe there was an error in the paperwork Lord Dumbledore was given. For I have the original copy of the Potter Will in my possession, and it clearly states who is and, just as importantly, who is NOT to gain custody of Mr. Potter.” This bombshell immediately got a reaction from most of the people in the room as they all contested to see who could be the loudest.

Regrettably for Dumbledore, he had to rely on the Toady Fudge show to back him and argue for him. It was shown this was a poor move as Dolores played herself right into Amelia’s hands with her next statement. “Hem Hem. I’m afraid I didn’t quite understand what you said. I could have sworn you just admitted to breaking the seal on a Will sealed by this esteemed body. Surely someone who is the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement wouldn’t do such a thing?”

‘Got you,’ Amelia thought smugly. She returned a deceptively wide smile toward the Undersecretary and closed the trap. “Why no, Madam Umbridge. The one in the Ministry is a copy of the original, marked as The Marauders of old marked their secret messages. That mark would transfer to any copy made from the original Will. There is also a mark to designate, under the Affirmo spell, that this will is the latest and therefore only pertinent Will made by the hands of James and Lilly Potter. The Goblins of Gringotts also only have a copy. The original was given to the Department of Mysteries, pursuant to Article III, Chapter 2, paragraph 5 of the Department’s charter, to wit, “Wills can be turned over to the Department of Mysteries for keeping and Legal Enforcement when the custody of anyone named in a Rank 6 or above Prophecy is named. Also all Unspeakables . . . “ Therefore since according to our Chief Warlock only a few days ago there was a high-ranking prophecy within the Hall of Prophecies concerning Mister Potter, they had kept a copy of the Potter Will with them. That copy was never sealed.”

“But I checked with them for any copies,” Albus exclaimed, so shocked beyond belief that something like this could get past him that he wasn’t thinking before he spoke.

“That’s because they had their highest security measures on the Will, which includes some rather top secret measures. It was only recently that the wards on the Will were tripped by the presence of Mr. Potter within the Department a scant month ago. I myself was only notified very recently of my position and given the original copy of the will. Now, either the copy here in the Ministry was tampered with before you saw it, Honored Chief Warlock, or you . . . perhaps . . . misread?”

Amelia could almost hear the gears grinding in Albus’s head as the implications filtered in. He would have to handle this really gently or it would blow up in his face and end very badly for him. Both he and she both knew there was no way to cover up the will now, and any attempt to discredit her copy would backfire upon him when the charms proved true. She inwardly cheered at roping Dumbledore into a corner and enjoyed watching him squirm. With the way things were going, the entire prophecy issue could be swept to the side.

It seemed that fate and Dolores Umbridge had other plans however, and once again she could be counted on to shoot herself in the foot. Her time with the Centaurs had really done a number on her, for she wouldn’t have fallen for this kind of trap a few years ago. “I demand to see proof of this Will, as well as proof of its authenticity.”

While Dumbledore visibly cringed, the Head of the DMLE stood and bowed toward the Undersecretary as she secretly relished this, “Of course, Madam Umbridge. Aurors Robards and Williamson, please find Liber and his guest in my office and escort them here.” Everyone talked amongst themselves for the few minutes that it took the aurors to go retrieve the people mentioned, but they all fell into silence when they saw and Unspeakable and Remus Lupin enter the chambers.

“What is that dark creature doing in here?” demanded Cornelius Fudge in outrage. “His kind cannot give testimony in these chambers. You of all people should know that Madam Bones.” Dumbledore

himself turned to stare heavily into the Marauder's eyes as if trying to read the man's mind. Unfortunately he forgot Legilimency cannot be used on werewolves. Even so, Remus shrunk back a bit under the glare of the Chief Warlock.

"Thank you Mr. Liber for finding and bringing Mr. Lupin," Amelia announced to the chamber, pointedly ignoring Fudge's outburst for the moment. The werewolf turned abruptly toward Amelia, the shock he was feeling easily readable in his face and eyes. "Relax Mr. Lupin, you are not in trouble. We of the Wizengamot just need your assistance for an important matter. You are not now, nor will you ever be, in trouble for showing up here today. But first I must apologize for not giving you any warning at all about this. Too much is happening too quickly."

Remus seemed to sigh in relief at her remarks, though he still appeared to have a hard time relaxing. Even though Albus was letting up on the death glare now, it was still obvious to anyone who looked that he expected some kind of trouble for being there. Amelia made a promise to herself to get him out from this situation with Dumbledore as quickly as possible. "Forgive me for belaboring the obvious Madam Bones, but I was under the distinct impression that Minister Fudge's statement about the ability for those who had contracted the lycanthropy disease to legally testify in court or Wizengamot proceedings is indeed factual?"

Good, Remus was actually doing exactly what she wanted of him. With a smooth nod she threw out that entire argument by saying, "You're not here to provide testimony directly, Mr. Lupin. Instead, you are, very much regrettably, the only person with the knowledge of the ways the Marauders used to work that we can contact. I need you here so you can give a password to a spell the Marauders came up with. The parchment that the spell is on will give the testimony required at that point."

Remus's eyes narrowed as he studied Amelia closely at this statement as if trying to figure out exactly what she knew and how. Though it did not please her in the least to see this level of suspicion, she hoped that by the end of the day she could get beyond that and

they would become friends. In the meantime the man nodded once and they both turned toward the man in grey robes.

“Identify yourself for the Wizengamot, if you will,” Amelia asked the Unspeakable. She hadn’t had much contact with Liber, but she knew that he, like the other members of his team were holding several large secrets. She only hoped that he would not be asked anything he could not answer.

“My real identity must remain secret per the rules and laws governing my Department, but my code name is Liber. I am the topography and beast expert for Team Gamma of the Department of Mysteries,” the man announced. Amelia noticed this man was normally soft spoken though not lacking in confidence. While he could be heard throughout the chamber, people had to listen closely, thus focusing them more on what he was saying. Director Bones mused that this entire Team would be forces to be reckoned with politically as well as in other ways. She for one was happy he was on her side.

Standing up, she grabbed a file that she had obscured before entering the chambers and headed down to the floor. Upon reaching it she muttered the counter-charm revealing a plain envelope with a broken wax seal on it. “Mr. Liber, can you identify the seal on this envelope please?”

“This is a Department of Mysteries seal for important documents,” the Unspeakable started. “It is used when the Department wishes to seal something for a time. As you can see, the date of the seal is imprinted inside the actual embossing. The date reads July 30, 1981.”

Amelia then paused to look around to ensure that everyone was still paying attention. After pulling out the papers inside and using the second layer of wax seals to confirm this was the document that the envelope originally contained, she said, “Now Mr. Liber, would you be so kind as to confirm the date and pertinence of this will for us?”

Mr. Liber began to take out his wand when the Minister of Magic stood up. “HALT! Only members of the Wizengamot and Directors of

the Ministry of Magic may cast spells in this chamber. Furthermore I do not recognize this man's expertise in spells for validation of wills."

"Minister Fudge, are you seriously suggesting that my own aurors, who are here guarding us all, cannot cast spells to that effect? That is very similar to what you are saying right now, you know."

"Actually Madam Bones," Albus interjects with a wide smile on his face, "Cornelius is quite correct. Your aurors are only exempt in cases of emergency or spells required to subdue prisoners. May I perhaps tender my services here?"

'Not on your life Albus, or mine for that matter,' Amelia privately thought behind her occlumency shields. Outwardly however she sighed as she looked around the chamber for someone else. She allowed herself to look chagrined, until her eyes fell upon Augusta Longbottom. She knew that the woman knew the spells for doing so, but she was not familiar with the Unspeakables' spells and seals. If only . . .

She was snagged out of that thought by a clearing of a soft chuckle from next to her. She had learned to tune out the whispers of Team Gamma as they talked through various spells and Technomage devices to each other, but to hear him chuckle during this rather serious situation was a rather large non-sequitur. "Minister Fudge, you are going to regret this in a few minutes," he said quietly, though his voice held an ironic undertone. "Let's see, the current procedure for admittance to the Wizengamot is the support of two members and proof that you actually are an Heir for the seat, correct Madam Bones?"

Amelia couldn't do anything other than smile at this as she took a step back. The rather sarcastically amused tone of Liber's voice told her that he was about to drop a bombshell. She had some clues that the team would be dropping them right and left soon, but not this soon. 'A plan never survives the first contact with the enemy, after all.' Outwardly she nodded with a cat-ate-the-canary smile. "That is correct, Mr Liber."

“Hem hem,” a rather girlish voice echoed immediately after Amelia’s confirmation. “Forgive me for not quite understanding you. How are you about to prove that you can sit here in the Wizengamot? You would have to reveal your identity, and doesn’t that go against the very rules you talked about earlier?” She herself looked like the Cat that ate the canary, or at least one that was ready to dine on bird.

Liber chuckled for a moment and actually shook his head. “Oh, I will reveal my identity to two people, Madam Umbridge. I already have clearance for doing so. But I do thank you for reminding me,” he said before he turned toward the chamber. “Lady Regent Longbottom, Lord Kentwhistle, would you mind coming down here and facing me for a moment?”

Both people named looked rather amazed at this. They apparently did not expect to be picked out, for they had very little in common with each other. The few things they did have in common were not generally known, so they were both wondering what the Unspeakable was up to. As they approached the man he pulled out a piece of parchment and a quill. “Normally I would have you sign a standard oath on your life and magic that you would not divulge my identity to anyone who does not already know ever. Given this situation, however, it is pretty impractical for such an oath to be given. Instead, this is an oath that states you will not divulge my identity to anyone who does not already know without the permission of myself, Charlemagne, or Jason for a set period of time. The oath also forbids you from divulging when you will be able to discuss it with others. That last clause is for your protection, to keep you from being jumped when the time frame is over. I would ask you to trust me enough to sign this please.”

Augusta, now that she was close enough to the young man to touch him, found something very familiar in the Unspeakable’s voice. It didn’t really compel her, but she trusted in what she knew and grabbed the quill. She winced as she signed her name in her own blood, but smiled afterwards. The Unspeakables were nothing if not thorough. Lord Kentwhistle was a little more distrustful as his years in Slytherin served him well as he watched the interaction between the Unspeakable and Lady Longbottom. The apparent inner struggle took a few minutes to get through, and finally ended when Liber whispered

something in his ear. For some reason that solved the Lord's dilemma and he signed the form rather quickly. Once the form was signed the Unspeakable pocketed both items and stood back to murmur the revealing spell.

The effect on both of the Wizengamot members was delayed only by a half a minute. During that time they stood there dumbfounded and blinking. Finally they both looked at each other then back at Liber. "How are . . ." they both exclaimed at the same time in shock.

"Trust me on this, please," the Unspeakable asked quietly, though he was rather amused by the reactions of the two members. They looked at each other, then nodded and looked back at Liber, nodding again. But when he turned toward the Minister, he took two steps forward to the wall of the raised dias. "Lady-Regent Longbottom, Lord Kentwhistle, do you recognize my right to serve on this council? Do I have your support in this?" After waiting for them both to announce vocally their support for his candidacy, he put his hand on one of the crests of the Founders. This elicited an audible gasp from most of the room. Amelia wondered what the Unspeakable was doing when he pressed his hand upon the Coat of Arms before him. And not for the first time did she wonder who this man was. But she was ready to support him at any rate so she prepared to handle the objections from Dumbledore and his cronies.

But their objections were never heard as Liber spoke loudly and clearly, "I, the Unspeakable called Liber, do hereby claim my Rights as the Heir of Hufflepuff. Let the Seats of the Founders arise to await their rightful Masters. Let my magic show my Right to sit on this Council and my Rights under the bylaws of the Ministry of Magic under the Reigning Monarch of the Empire of Britain." The dias that was occupied by the Chief of the Wizengamot and the Minister of Magic was pushed forward and another dias rose above and behind them. On this dias were five chairs. Four of them were marked with the Arms of the Heirs, and the center fifth one had England's Coat of Arms embossed into it. A loud chime was heard throughout the Ministry as every person knew that one of the Heirs of the Founders just claimed their place.

“So, does this provide enough proof for you?” Liber asked his three opponents, who simply sat there unable to believe their eyes. Liber had in one move made his obtainment of a Wizengamot seat incontestable. The arms of the Founding Fathers were charmed with ancient recognitions spells, and would only recognize the true heirs of the seats through the person’s magic. There could be no refuting this proof, and even under the bylaws he didn’t need the other two people’s support for his candidacy.

Dumbledore’s eye twinkling shut down and just for a moment his true face showed. This was not a happy man. There were powers given to the heirs of those seats even he dared not stand against. However decades that led into centuries of maneuvering served him well, for he quickly schooled his face into the benign “Leader of the Light” mask he normally wore and stood up to pronounce, “The seat of Founder’s Heir Hufflepuff has been claimed and proven. Let no man stand against this claim.” The Chief Warlock stood there silent for a moment before addressing the Unspeakable. “Unspeakable Liber, is it truly your intention on running this seat as an Unspeakable? Is there not a conflict of interests here?”

Liber actually laughed at this question as if it were the most absurd thing he’d ever heard. But the laugh was short lived as Liber answered the question. “No, I do not intend on running this seat in my current garb. I will assign a proxy after this meeting, and she will serve in my stead until such time as I can take it up under my true identity, or a year passes, whichever comes first. In the meantime, I will continue with this procedure, if I may?”

With those words the last publicly possible bid he could make to prevent this collapsed. While he was sighing with resignation on the inside, outwardly the old man gave the Unspeakable a favorable nod to continue.

“Affirmo Will,” Liber intoned with a whip-like flick of his wand. The parchment began to glow a bright blue while its edges deepened into a gold color. The initials, “JP+LP(E)” projected above the will, along with the date “October 30, 1981.” After quick consultation with secretary of the Wizengamot, this was proved to be the same date

the sealed copies were written. "This will is the most recent and binding of the wills by James and Lily Potter," Liber intoned as he stepped back.

Amelia gave the Unspeakable a curt nod before turning to the werewolf. "Mr. Lupin would you be so kind to supply the password?"

Remus took out his wand from an arm holster and was about to do as asked when Cornelius tried to interrupt on the same basis as before. But before he could say anything the man with the wand beat him to it. "I'm not casting a spell. The password is voice activated by pressing a wand, any wand, upon it. The spell on the parchment won't allow for it to be changed, but will allow for the person with both the wand and the password, as well as anyone else we authorize, to read it." Once that was understood, Remus tapped the parchment once and murmured, "I solemnly swear I'm up to no good." The parchment instantly glowed red and gold, and the writing on it became clearly apparent in bright gold lettering. "As you can see by the Gryphendor colors, this will was written by James and Lily."

Amelia smiled widely as Liber moved away from the group and sat upon his chair in the Council. Once she was sure he was there she joined the last Marauder and flipped over to the page of guardianship declarations.

"If we should both die before our child, Harry James Potter, reaches his age of Majority, then we designate the following people as his Guardians, in order of preference:

Sirius Orion Black
Remus Lupin
Frank and Alice Longbottom
Amelia Susan Bones
Augusta Longbottom
Gregory and Janice Bones

If none of these people are eligible to take Harry for any reason, then he is to be given to any relative of the Potter Family left alive. If none exist, then he is to go to the Weasley Family. If none of these others are able to take Harry, then he is to go to either a Magical or Muggle

orphanage. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES is he to be given to the Dursleys. They detest everything Magical and Petunia Dursley has disowned Lily Potter. Thus they are NOT family and ARE NOT to be given custody . . . “

Amelia tapped the scroll once and the lettering appeared in the air above the will for all to see. “As you can see, the only person currently able to take Guardianship of Harry Potter besides me is Lady-Regent Longbottom. As I was placed higher on the list than her, I was offered first chance. I am, per this will, Harry Potter’s legal guardian. Therefore Lord Dumbledore, the reason you cannot have access to Harry is that I have denied it to you.” She tilted her head to the side for a moment in thought before deciding to end this, “Now that we’re clear on the Department of Mystery’s standpoint on this, may I ask under what cause you are attempting to invoke the McAllen accord? What makes Mr. Potter so important to the security of the Ministry of Magic?”

Dumbledore’s face shut down here. Everyone could tell that he was held over a barrel at this point. Everyone was questioning what had happened to allow the young man in question to be given to the very people his parent’s will expressly forbade had anything to do with him. Also the question of why the Minister and the Chief Warlock were pursuing this so assiduously. Finally he had to fall back on the one thing he knew would not work, “I’m afraid that is a State Secret, Lady Bones.”

Amelia moved back to her seat and sat down. She adopted a serious visage before saying, “The McAllen accord states that the reasons for invoking it must be plainly and completely declared. If the reason is a State Secret, then the room can be cleared of all but Wizengamot members. But the Secret must be divulged. Shall we continue this, or does the motion fail for improper procedure?”

Ministry of Magic
Department of Mysteries
Charlemagne’s POV

Charlemagne sat in a chair in his team room and was slowly messaging his temples. All this time travel work gave him a headache, and on top of it all he had to deal with the necessity of what was happening a few stories above right now. At first he thought Liber was kidding when the news came through the transmitters, but as he heard the background he realized that it was indeed true. Two incompetents, as well as Dumbledore, had managed to corner the group into giving away one of its secrets before it was ready. This required some basic rethinking of the plan, as well as requiring that the timetable on certain things got sped up. "The best laid plans seldom survive the first encounter with the enemy," he said aloud to the room.

"That is something you should know full well by now," Firebrand's slightly amused voice responded. Charlie sat up quickly and looked at the woman and blinked a few times owlily. She smiled and moved into the room with Raptor and then took a seat near her boss. "We gave you enough opportunities to learn that lesson after all, didn't we?" She smiled widely as she stole a glance to Raptor before continuing, "Don't worry, Liber will be fine. He's a good man. You taught him well. In the meantime however, I'd like to ask you a couple of questions to help get your mind off of him, okay?"

Charlie leaned back into his chair and nodded quietly. He knew this question would be coming soon after Amelia's first visit with Harry. Indeed, he idly wondered what had taken them so long to come to him.

Raptor, having taken the resigned nod as it was meant, sighed and started the questioning off. "Okay, easy question first, what's the status of the Marauders? Padfoot was mentioned already, but what about the others?"

Charlie was clearly not expecting the opening question, and thus immediately gave an open answer, though the first word was more snarled. "Wormtail is wherever Voldemort is, likely sniveling along with his half-blood master." He quickly cut off a probable exclamation from Firebrand by saying, "Voldemort is a half blood, non-magical father witch mother. Ironical that so many purebloods follow him, you know? Anyway, the rat is pretty much a hunted man by the other t . . .

Marauder. Moony is still a member of Dumbledore's Order, as far as I'm aware. It wasn't until Mr. Potter was a third year that he was introduced to Moony, though Moony did help out when asked. Contact between the Boy-Who-Lived and him has been very limited since then as Dumbledore loves to send him on missions."

Raptor looked at Firebrand for a moment as if asking her to make a mental note of this. "We'll find out more about Moony after all of this. From what Amelia was saying, she's got him in front of the Wizengamot to help with the Will and a few other things. Now, what about Padfoot?"

Charlie sighed sadly at the question but continued, "Sirius was put into Azkaban without a trial for betraying you and killing a baker's dozen of non-magicals. He escaped during third year, the same year Mooney was Defense teacher, to hunt down Wormtail. He was captured briefly, but then escaped on the back of a hippogryph, becoming a fugitive. He spent the first of the next two years on the run in various places, until Voldemort regained his body. Then he was a prisoner at the Black Manor, with only the house elf Kreacher and occasionally Order members to keep him company. Finally he was Stupified through the Veil here at the department of mysteries by Bellatrix Lestrange. That was about a month, give or take ago."

Both Raptor and Firebrand's mouths were agape about halfway through that explanation. As it ended they turned almost as one and looked at each other in disbelief and shock. They seemed to be communicating silently with each other for a few moments before returning their attention to Charlie. If Charlemagne had not been slightly grieving about Sirius, or had the matter not been so serious he would have laughed at their reactions and expressions. All the same all he could do is sit there and wait for the two other Unspeakables to regain their ability to speak.

"No wonder," Firebrand finally murmured with the sound of grief thick in her voice. "He seemed so . . . lost. He looked like there was nothing left in the world for him, especially as you told him the first prophecy after Dumbledore's. I wanted to reach out and pull him in a hug and never let him go. It's bad enough he had to stay with the Dursley's, but this?" Charlie did his best to hide his feelings at the

sound of pity in the female's voice and was about to respond when Raptor broke in.

“Okay, so why did he get accused with betraying the Potters? And why didn't Dumbledore do anything? He was the one who performed the Fidelius Charm and knew who the secret keeper was. Even so, as head of the Wizengamot . . . “

“The man looks only after his interests, just like our inept Minister of Magic and his pet toad,” Liber's voice sounded from the door as he entered. Amelia was behind him and nodded her head in agreement. “I may not know as much of the story as everyone else, but it was rather obvious from today the man is up to something. He still wants to be the only person in Harry Potter's world. And it took pointing out several things to keep him from it.” Liber looked tired, a little aggravated, but at the same time triumphant. “He is blocked for now, but he's nothing if not determined Charlie.”

Charlie nodded at Liber before turning his gaze upon Amelia. “Thank you for all the help you've given us so far, Amelia. I know you feel a little guilty about Harry Potter's treatment, but don't be. There's absolutely nothing you could have done for him until just recently.” Charlie was indeed thankful to the woman and it showed in his voice. “I know we'll rely on you for other help in the near future, especially given what all we need to do.”

Before anyone else could respond to this statement the door to the team room opened again to welcome Pheobe. Normally she would smile at Charlie and show some kind of affection, but she appeared to be far too excited. Charlie sincerely hoped it was what he thought it was, but before even Pheobe could say anything the door opened up again to admit the rest of Team Gamma. Everyone seemed to realize that something important was about to be decided for they all (save for Pheobe) took seats immediately.

Once she was ensured the door was closed, she got right to the point. “Ms. Granger has got it,” she pronounced to the room. This had a profound effect on Charlemagne, who was finally able to breath an internal sigh of relief. Now things were falling into place.

Sun Tsu spoke up next, his voice soft as Liber's though of a different pitch. "Mr. And Ms. Weasley are as ready as they'll get. Mr. Weasley is still studying history, but he also seems to be branching to strategies of the time. He's finally seeming to look for patterns in events. The others will be in for quite a shock."

Selene cleared her throat and said, "Other than studying her butt off, Ms. Weasley is being very supportive of all the others and beginning to augment Mr. Longbottom's activities. She's still a bit withdrawn, but she'll get there."

Liber didn't have too much to add save, "Mr. Longbottom is taking his lessons to heart and is spending as much time as he can around Mr. Potter."

Charlemagne leaned back for a moment in deep thought. He knew the times would be difficult for the other three, but he knew they could work things out. "And what about the Triumvirate?"

Athena cleared her throat at the question and all eyes turned toward her. "Mr. Potter is depressed, but fighting. Though right now it is only half an effort, for he has to fight hopelessness and almost 15 years of systemic abuse and degradation on top of it all. It will be an uphill battle, and only time will tell if Humpty Dumpty will be whole again. Or at least that's what I would say normally. Ms. Lovegood seems to be making a concerted effort to get through Mr. Potters shields and walls to let him know there's someone left that he can turn to. She seems to be in the middle of a balancing act between Mr. Potter and Ms. Granger however. The only concern I have is her not having anyone to turn to when she needs it."

"I've already given Ms. Weasley and Mr. Longbottom a couple of nudges in that department," Selene interrupted. "They said they'd watch out for her, even though they don't know why they need to do so."

Athena nodded once at Selene with a very appreciative smile on her face. "Ms. Lovegood found a book on bonds that she's given to Mr. Potter. During his off times I've noticed Mr. Potter reading through it,

so it won't be long before he realizes something is up. All bets are off about his emotional state at that point."

Charlie had to repress a shudder at that last statement, knowing all too well what the young man's moods could be like. Instead he focused on the task at hand. "Okay, our window of discretion is about out. The more contact we have with the Ministry Six, the more chances that someone will figure things out, which could cause problems if not handled properly. The plan was once Ms. Granger had the knowledge of Time she needed and Ms. Lovegood was stable enough in her emotions to be able to utilize her powers to their fullest extent, we would send them off to do what they needed to do. What does everyone else think?"

The common consensus about Ronald, Neville, and Ginny were they were all geared and ready. This time Pheobe spoke up about the other three. "Ms. Lovegood is as ready as she'll ever be. Ms. Granger is a little lost, but she will eventually get it. I think we can no longer afford to wait, especially with what Liber described about the Wizengamot session over the link. We need to start implementing our plans as soon as possible."

Amelia looked between everyone and nodded. "I've got the research and names you asked for done, Charlie. I was able to keep the initials and blood status the same as they had for all but Harry and Ms. Granger. They'll need some work with Wizarding traditions in order to be able to pass for half bloods raised in the wizarding world. I've also got spells ready that will change their facial profiles so that there's no chance that they'll be recognized in recent history from their times. They'll have to renew the spell once a month, but it can't be dispelled even with a Finite Maximus. I've already taught it to Harry and Ms. Granger. Last but not least I have identity packets for all of them to learn for their new names. This way everyone has time to brush up on things before they run into Dumbledore or anyone else not a part of the DOM then."

"Well, it seems as if we're ready. So do I have a consensus here?" After waiting for everyone to nod Charlie stood up and said, "Okay gather everyone in Training Room A and I'll go get Jason and Croaker."

Training Room A
Department of Mysteries
Harry's POV

Harry was trying really hard to keep going in the light of everything that was happening. He knew that Sirius would not want him to give up, but there were times when it was just so hard to keep going when he had nothing and no one. He knew in his mind he wasn't alone, but his heart felt like there was no one there to care for him anymore. There were times when something undefined cropped up, but it was quickly drowned in a sea of hopelessness. Finally he had to put on a mask of determination in order to keep everyone from worrying about him. So far it was working, but it was almost as hard as keeping on going was. But he would not stop until Voldemort and Bellatrix were both gone, then he'd find a place to roll up and die. He owed Sirius that much for getting him killed at least.

There was that twinge of feeling again. It seemed odd that whenever he thought of just giving up, or when he felt his loneliest, or when he thought of his death, something flared inside. He couldn't tell what it was, but in a way it was both unwelcome and welcome. A small part of him, the part the Unspeakables and Hermione had been working on, found his thoughts repugnant and fought them. It welcomed that spark, and tried to fan it higher. The rest of him tried to fight it, but found it harder and harder every time. This was especially true whenever he'd look at either Luna or Hermione when the inner battles were underway. Times like now. He kept his gaze toward the door to the Training room, for right now he wasn't sure he was ready for that spark to flare.

He suddenly felt a hand on his shoulder which caused him to shock out of his silent reverie. The hand apparently belonged to Luna, who was suddenly standing at his side with a sad smile. 'It will be okay Harry. You're not alone.' He found it odd that the inner voice of his was suddenly sounding a lot like Luna. Normally it was Hermione's voice he heard, though recently the voices switched back and forth depending on what he was struggling with, or sometimes who was closer. He couldn't help the sad smile forming on his face now, and the wishes to wallow in grief seemed to ebb away at the same time.

For not the first time he wondered how she could do that. He resolved to ask her sometime soon as the door opened and Team Gamma, along with Jason and Amelia stepped in. Amelia brought Susan in tow.

Susan was another unknown in Harry's life. The Hufflepuff was here nearly every waking hour of the day, and showed no interest in going elsewhere. She spent time with only three people other than her aunt, any one of which would be weird on their own. First there was Ron. For some reason she spent a lot of time talking quietly with him about something he'd tell no one else. Harry was convinced that Ginny knew, but she was not talking. Still Harry had to be happy for Ron, simply because his best friend came out of his self-imposed exile when she did. Not that he was one to talk though, for that's where he tried to end up all the time, only to be interrupted like he was on some kind of suicide watch. Susan had apparently joined that watch whenever Hermione and Luna were unavailable. They had spent long hours getting to know each other as cousins, time Harry could only chuckle about. She was a funny young woman after all.

The oddest person that was around Susan was SunTsu. For some reason the two of them talked about a lot of things while Ron and Harry were training, and at first this angered Ron for some strange reason. But Susan calmly reasoned with Ron to get him to understand (without telling him why) that he had nothing to worry about. Ron seemed to calm down after a short ten minute discussion, something that both Harry and Hermione could only sit in awe about. Ron's temper was legend, and neither one of them could keep an argument with him that short. It must have helped that no one knew why Sun Tsu was interested in her.

"It's time," Charlie announced, causing Harry's thoughts to derail and drift to the back of his mind. "As I mentioned before, you will all go back into the past for both training and to complete portions of the prophecies. When you'll end up you'll know soon enough. But to borrow a phrase from Alastair Moody, Constant Vigilance. You will have to keep up your personas at all times, and remember to apply the disguise charm every moth religiously without fail. You can cast it on each other in cases of emergency, so study each other's faces very closely. Failure to do so could not only be embarrassing, but

could be catastrophic in its consequences. When you get back, one of the first skills you will master is Occlumency. That will keep anyone out of your minds to prevent others from discovering your secrets that way. Occlumency will also help you keep your past identities secret.”

At this point Amelia pulled a box out of her pocket and enlarged it. Inside the box was several thick envelopes as well as some shrunken pouches. Quickly she passed out the envelopes along with an explanation. “These packets detail your identities as well as most important facts about the personal time line. Each identity has been carefully crafted to be as close to your current as possible without actually giving too many clues to people in the presence. There are only two main exceptions to this: Harry, you’re identity is a half blood who’s grandmother was a first generation witch instead of your mother. As such you were raised in the Magical World. Ms. Granger, your packet is similar, except that it was your grandfather instead of your grandmother. At this point I’ll introduce you all to each other so you have an idea of who you’re talking to before you walk through that door.”

First she placed a hand on Harry’s other shoulder and said, “Harry is Halstead Jerimiah Penwell, of the Penwell family.” She took a step forward and rested her hand on Luna’s arm before saying, “Ms. Lovegood is now Lilith Leedham, followed by Ms Granger who is now Haleigh Joyce Galway.” The teens mouthed the names as she said each one, and so far as far as Harry could tell everyone was fine with their names. “Mr. And Ms. Weasley are now Ryan and Gwyneth Whitcomb of the Whitcomb family. And finally Mr. Longbottom is now Nathan Lambeth. From here on out we will be calling you by those assumed names, and I recommend you do the same.”

Jason then stepped forward and enlarged a series of six trunks. Each one looked a lot like Moody’s trunk from Harry’s fourth year, complete with locking system. “These are your Unspeakable gear. As you all know, you’ve signed a lot of forms and took no few oaths. As of now you are all Unspeakables in Training. After you arrive at your destination time you’ll need to open these trunks and place the light grey robes on as quickly as possible. They’re enchanted to conceal your faces from everyone save Croaker or myself. It would take quite a lot of effort to break these charms, but it can be done. So don’t

leave them lying around.” Jason brought one trunk over to Harry and set it in front of him. He noticed that his initials were engraved on the top, but before he could voice his concern at that Jason continued, “Don’t worry. Once you open the documentation inside the names on the trunks will change to your Unspeakable names. Mr. Potter will be the head of your team, so his packet will have a few additional papers. Mr. Penwell, will you please open the trunk? Each trunk is keyed to both blood and magic, and can only be opened by setting your hand and wand on the top while you turn the keys.”

Jason then spent a short amount of time going over each piece of equipment in the trunk, being careful to note any difference between the contents of the trunks depending on the user. After answering any questions, he turned toward Charlie for him to step up. “Okay folks, it’s time to go.” With this Charlie led them all to the round room to stop before the door to the locked room. There he whispered to Harry the instructions for opening the room. Even though Harry was feeling a little apprehensive, he did as instructed and the door opened. “Well, it’s been interesting meeting you all. I’m sure we’ll see you in a few years,” Charlie said enigmatically before shooing Harry and his friends through it. The door closed behind the last person through, who ironically enough was Ryan, and a thousand tiny spiders traced long thin threads of silk over the door. It flashed brightly for a moment, then settled. “This has to be the single weirdest thing I’ve ever done,” he said as he followed everyone else into Team Gamma’s room. A gasp from Amelia and Croaker echoed through the room as Charlie took off the hood of his cloak.

Location Unknown

Outside of Time

Harry’s (Halstead’s) POV

The group wound up falling for what appeared to be a short amount of time through complete darkness until they touched down into some kind of foyer. The place was rather resplendent in grandeur, but the decor seemed to be set in mind to put people at ease. Overall Halstead was both impressed and at the same time cautious. This did not look like the Department of Mysteries. He quietly drew his wand, which spurred everyone else to do the same. A feminine clearing of a

throat caused him to jump and spin toward the sound. There, standing in an archway that appeared to enter a hallway stood a woman. Her light brown hair flowed down toward the small of her back and framed the deceptively delicate-looking body and face. Her blue eyes were intense but warm as Halstead felt his very soul inspected. He shivered slightly before something inside him seemed to roar in anger. She didn't look imposing or hostile, but something was setting him off toward the woman. Two hands grasped his shoulder from behind him, but he kept his wand trained on the woman.

The woman stared down Halstead's wand for what felt like several minutes. A repentant look crossed her face, which for some reason seemed to fuel Halstead's anger even more. For some reason the woman seemed to be able to read his mood like an open book, and the sad sigh that followed did nothing to relieve the situation. He did not want this woman's pity! "Who are you?" he asked in a tight controlled voice that bespoke his near killing rage.

"In the wizarding world I am known as Aerten, though I'm known by many other names depending on what beliefs you have," Only Luna seemed to recognize the name, and for the first time Halstead could remember Halstead looked fearful as her eyes darted back between him and the new lady. He couldn't tell if she was afraid of him or for him, though. The spark in his heart was suddenly pleading for him to remain calm while the sea of torment within him seemed to surge forward in desperation to take its pain out on this woman. That name meant something to him, but he couldn't place it.

The woman seemed to brace herself as she continued. "The more common name you'd know would be Clotho. As in one aspect of . . . "

PAIN! ANGER! Halstead's world reddened and shrunk to the woman in front of him. "YOU! BECAUSE OF YOU!" he roared before letting loose a stream of obscenities that he normally would never have even thought of using. Suddenly his wand was in motion as he incanted spell after spell. "EXPELLIARMUS! STUPIFY! INCENDIA TELUM! DEPULSO! REDUCTO! BOMBARDA!" Each spell got more and more deadly as the seconds passed by and the woman seemed completely unharmed and unaffected by the spells. Halstead didn't

even notice the hot tears running down his face, and the others were too stunned by his sudden attacks to do anything.

Finally the thought that he couldn't touch her with magic penetrated his rage-filled brain and he surged forward, dropping his wand. A solid punch flew out from his hand to land on her jaw, where it stopped as if it hit a statue. An audible crack of broken bones were heard. This gave him pause enough for her to quickly grab him into her arms where she simply hugged him like a mother would. Halstead continued to wail and pound on the woman without any concern for his own injuries for what appeared like a couple of hours until he sagged into her, too tired to continue. All this time the woman only made calming nurturing noises toward him. The others seemed very uncomfortable about this display, but they were also very concerned for Halstead.

Haleigh reached down and picked up his wand and started to walk over to them hesitantly. Suddenly she was grabbed by Lilith and almost dragged over to the two people. Halstead couldn't tell anything from them until he felt both Lilith's and Haleigh's arms around them as the woman continued to try to calm him down. Finally he heard both Lilith's and Haleigh's voice in his head telling him over and over that everything would be okay, that they were there and would not let him be hurt. Shortly after that he heard the woman's voice and the words behind it.

"I'm sorry Harry. I'm so sorry. I never meant for you to suffer like this. It was never supposed to be this way. Please calm down honey. I'm so sorry."

These words struck him to the core, and for some reason they rang absolute truth to him. It was something Halstead could not deny, no matter how much a part of him wanted to. It was something that caused the focus of his pain and rage to vanish, and without that focus the storm of suffering and anger blew itself out. The internal voices of his were echoed by non-sensical soothing noises from his two female friends. Finally one last howl of pain ripped through his throat to echo in the chamber before he slid into the woman's arms in quiet tears.

The others jumped from the wall and started forward, apparently feeling it was safe to do so. Halstead barely felt it when all the others laid their hands on him offering emotional support. The voices inside of him gave him an emotional bearing to pull himself together from, and an indeterminate time later he finally looked up into the piercing blue eyes of the woman holding him. "Mum . . . Dad . . . Sirius . . . They truly weren't meant to die?" he asked, sounding like a small lost child.

Clotho's heart appeared to break at the question as she tightened her grip on him. "No baby, they weren't supposed to die. I'm so sorry. If I could have done anything about it then, I would have."

Harry's head snapped back in shock. "But you're FATE! You're a Goddess! Surely . . . ?"

"Harry, I may be a Goddess, but I'm bound by rules just like you are. Just as the rules you're bound by are a lot more lenient than say . . . Seamus Finnigan's rules, my rules are more lenient than yours. But they are still rules. Even Fate must make allowance for Free Will Harry. Why do you think Divination is such a loose discipline? Even my Seeress," she said with a slight smile to Luna, "can only See so much before she comes lost in the possibilities. Please believe me Harry. If there was anything I could have done, I would of."

"But the prophecy . . . Sirius . . ."

Clotho sighed while shedding a lone tear, "Harry, that prophecy was made after his trip to the land of the Dead. Until he actually took that curse there was a chance he could have survived. I could only use that as a springboard, nothing else. But Harry, remember this. Those prophecies are put there to give you something back. To give you hope. Not all is lost, Harry. The Free Will of another took the people who loved you away, and sent you into this downward spiral. Let me help you now to get some of that back. Please?"

For the first time he thought, really thought, about the prophecies that Luna made. He thought about all that happened, and what the prophecies actually said. He felt Luna's arms around him, rubbing his

back lovingly. He also felt Hermione's arms and hand doing the same. Finally he started to wiggle to be let up and his friends started to comply, though both Hermione and Luna never once moved much further than a foot from him. "Okay," he replied in a voice barely above a whisper. He felt a bit lighter than he did before, as if some kind of burden was lightened. It wasn't being lifted from him, but for the first time since Sirius died he found a small fire of hope deep within himself.

Fate smiled warmly at that and hugged him once more before releasing him. "Many of the Heroes of Old had patron Gods and Goddesses." Harry's automatic 'Just Harry' reflex was about to show itself but was stopped by Clotho with her hand, "You're a Hero Harry. There's no doubt about it. Remember, many of the rules that apply to normal Wizards don't apply to you. Anyway, as I was saying, many of the Heroes had patrons. Harry, you are my Child in that respect. I need you to do something for me. The choices you make while you do this will dictate what the future holds. But first let me show you what the current events are leading the world to." With this she waived everyone forward to join her in a work room.

There were mounds of silvery thread and looms situated throughout the room, with a huge tapestry on the wall. The tapestry was divided into seven sections, three small ones lined vertically on the left, another three lined up on the right, and one large one in the center. The ones on the left showed scenes all six of them recognized were from the recent past while the center one showed them all in the very room they were in. On the right the top one showed a picture of Tom and Halstead fighting, with someone in the background pointing their wand at them. As the scene unfolded two sickly green beams shot from the unknown man to strike both Voldemort and Halstead, who immediately fell down dead. It then recycled to start with the six leaving the castle heading back to their own time with no one with them. The battle occurred again with the same effect. The second on the right showed London in flames as Wizards, Muggles and magical beasts fought savagely. The last panel on the right appeared to be burnt through the tapestry, showing nothing.

Halstead could only watch as Lilith walked over and touched the wall through the hole, her normally bulging eyes seeming to melt as tears

flowed down her face. “No . . . this can’t be.” She turned back toward him and looked into his eyes with a look that threatened to shatter his heart again. “Please Harry, don’t let this be.”

“I . . . I don’t understand.”

“Harry,” Clotho’s voice whispered behind him. “This is The Tapestry. This is one of my main tools to help guide the world. The center scene is you, now, here. The ones on the left are the past, and the one on the right are the future. It is impossible to damage this tapestry. The only time it can be damaged is when it is destroyed. The only thing that could destroy it is the complete destruction of every living thing in or on the world.”

Realization struck Halstead as he heard this, and he realized what that hole in the fabric meant. “If we don’t complete the prophecies, the world will end?” he asked as though dreading the answer. Clotho could only nod once sadly, a motion mirrored by Luna. Harry stepped forward and hugged Luna then, which surprised everyone in the room. But what surprised them even more was what Harry said when next he spoke, “Luna, love . . . I promise you I’ll do everything I can to ensure that doesn’t happen. I promise you I’ll do whatever it takes to make sure we all live in peace after everything is said and done.”

A wave of hope rippled through the workroom as Halstead made this pledge. A spark of love could also be felt from within Harry as his soul started to finally mend itself. Gwyneth turned into Nathan’s embrace and cried quietly while Ryan watched with both a bittersweet expression on his face. A similar expression was worn very briefly by Haleigh before she schooled a look of support on her face. Halstead had missed this expression, though he felt a twinge of something inside him that couldn’t be identified. In the meantime Lilith dropped her head into his shoulders and cried in relief, quietly thanking him. He just stood there and held her for a while she calmed down. Finally everyone’s emotions ran their course, and they all turned to look at Clotho.

“I’m sorry I attacked you,” he started to say, but accepted her assurances that she understood before continuing, “I think we’re ready now. Is there anything else you need for us to know?”

Fate smiled beatifically at her champion before guiding them out of the workroom and down the hall. Finally they reached a silvery portal. Here she stopped and faced them. “Harry . . . Halstead, listen to your hearts, and you will succeed. I have faith in you and those that are with you. You’re all Heroes, and you all deserve to the chance to prove yourself. Just remember not everything is what it seems, and that Darkness is most adept at hiding things within its folds. Finally, remember to love Harry.” As Halstead stepped forward and hugged her again she smiled affectionately at him. “You’ll see me again. You’ll come back the same way, after all.”

Haleigh cleared her throat, causing both Fate and Halstead to turn their heads to look at her. “Can you tell us When you’re sending us?”

Fate chuckled and tapped the edge of the portal with her hand, causing the silver substance to surge within its own confines before settling into a picture of a door just like the one they used to get here. “You’ll be brought to July 1, 1975. This is during the time you’ll find the Children of Time at their most trusting. You’ll have to convince them. But remember, you can’t change the most important parts. Pettigrew must betray your parents Harry. I’m sorry.”

Halstead blinked in shock for a moment before releasing a heavy sigh. In way he expected this, and nodded once. “Thank you Clotho. I expected that. As much as I wish I could keep the rat from doing what he did, I understand that we’ll have to be most careful. Fortunately with Luna and Hermione, we can pick and choose our battles.”

Clotho’s smile widened as she beamed. “You’ll get there Harry. I have faith in you.” With this she hugged him once more before ushering them through the door.

Circular Door Chamber
Department of Mysteries
Ministry of Magic
London, England

July 1, 1975

Alarm claxons sounded as a group of six young men and women entered the chamber through what had always been a locked door. As Halstead closed the door behind him he called out, "Everyone expand your trunks and get into gear." Halstead was already moving as he said this, his trunk down on the ground and open. Quickly he donned the robes and pulled the hood over his face. Then he took out his badge, shrugged at it and placed it on. The others were hurrying to do so as well, with Gwyneth being the last person to get her badge on and her folder open before they found themselves surrounded by Unspeakables with wands pointed at them.

Harry had already given his paperwork a glance before Jason entered the area with Croaker. Both had their wands pointed at him. "You are not any unspeakable I know. Who are you? How did you get here?" the Master Unspeakable challenged.

Harry took two short steps forward and halted when the wands jabbed in his direction. "I am Charlemagne, Trainee Leader of Team Gamma. I have come under code blue. I need to speak to you and Croaker in private, with only my team and any other one person you trust present."

A/N: I have not come up with a song for this chapter yet (see my profile for meaning on that). For here on out, I will be referring to Harry and crew by their most applicable names. The "past time" names I already have posted, and as you can see Harry's "Unspeakable" name has also been declared. Depending on what happens when I write the next chapter will tell me if I'll include an author's note at the beginning of the chapter with the who's who of Unspeakable names.

Chapter 4: Thoughts in Perspective

Department of Mysteries
Ministry of Magic
London, England
July 21, 1975
Ron's POV

Ron sent a stunner toward his opponent, and unspeakable that had been introduced earlier as Condor, who quickly ducked and responded with a five-spell chain that ended with the blasting curse. Had Ron been anywhere near the spot he had just fired the spell from, they would have blown through his shielding and caused him no end of problems. Instead he had apparated just after casting the spell to a point behind his opponent. Ron then cast his own five-spell chain, ending with a stunner, a body bind hex and a disarming charm. The first two spells got the unspeakable's attention, while the last three blew through the shields and brought the man down. After Ron cast an enervate spell, the recently-unconscious man got back up to his feet.

"Good job Sun Tsu. You're still a little slow to use the spell chains, but they're powerful enough to get through most people's shields." Condor looked the young trainee over and nodded. "You're wearing out, and our lessons are nearly over for today. Go get a shower and then some food." With this the man turned and walked over to watch Harry fight.

Ron followed his sparring partner over and gave the man a sheepish grin. Truth be told, not many people would want to miss the spectacle that was his best friend's match. Harry was most often pitted against some of the best people in the department, and for good reason. Today's special partner was Croaker, who was a veritable genius when it came to off-the-wall improvisation. Luna had explained to all of them after the first duel between him and her. Croaker was her Uncle, and had access to two pureblood lines of fighting. The Croaker line was to Defense what the Lovegood Line was to Magical Creatures. Some of the most obscure spells and tactics that had ever been created came from the Croaker line. And there were few that could ever match them in off-the-cuff strategy. The Lovegood line's

fighting was about anticipating what your opponent was going to do before they did it, and countering that. This had fit well with what most families knew about the Lovegoods: they may be strange or unusual, but never get in a duel with one. The results are always deadly.

This wasn't Harry's first time fighting the Master Unspeakable, which served to get everyone more excited. Charms, curses, transfiguration spells, countercurses and counterjinxes flew in torrents between the two men. The area between them was a known no-man's land, as getting between them would be very unfavorable for a person's health. Indeed, the very air between them crackled with excess energy which had left people's hair on end even on the other end of the dueling ward. Ron stood there flabbergasted at the skill of both opponents, but more so at Harry's ability. He felt a dark feeling of jealousy on the edge of his heart as a small part of him wished it was him capable of doing that. 'Do you really? Do you want to pay the price for the power and the ability he has?' There was that voice again. Ever since he came in contact with that brain he felt something on the edge of his consciousness. He didn't quite know what it was, but soon afterward he started hearing that voice. It was normally caustic but never truly cruel. Instead it gave him advice from time to time and pointed things out to him that he could not deny. In truth, it was part of the reason he had become so serious since the DOM battle.

'No, not really,' Ron thought to the voice as he watched his mate fight the Master Unspeakable. This was an old road that voice and he had traveled many times before as all his past actions and resentments were brought up for close inspection. Many things that he thought he had done right on had been shown to be very much wrong. In his first year, for example, he was the reason Hermione was in danger to begin with. Had he treated the lessons with the seriousness they were due, and squashed his resentment at her tone, he would never have said what he did, and she wouldn't have gone off to cry in that bathroom. Then when Harry dragged him along to save her, he didn't want to go. After all, she was a pain! Why should he care? After it was all over he never questioned his actions, never thought the details until that voice forced him to. Now, looking back on it, he was very ashamed of what he had done. In fact, his whole relationship with Hermione was like that, and he never really

apologized and truly meant it.

Then there was Harry. If Ron was honest with himself, and he was now trying to be, it was partly his fault the Boy-Who-Lived hadn't been as prepared as he could be. Oh, Harry showed he could learn and study with the best of them, but most of the time Ron's carefree and lazy attitude forced his friend to spend too much time doing other things. Ron hadn't really understood moderation, or prioritization, and that cost. The voice laid it all out for him, showing the young Weasley instance after instance where Hermione tried to get them to study and Ron managed to drag Harry off. In fact, the young redhead often wondered what would have happened if his friend wasn't a natural genius when it came to Defense. Would they all have been dead now? Would You-Know-Who have won? More than once the thoughts of what could have been made the young man shiver. No, the jealousy and laziness that was within Ron had all but been destroyed by now, killed by both the voice in his head and the thoughts of the consequences of his actions. He had sworn a week or so ago that he would change, that he would become the man he needed to be.

Ron was broken out of his reverie by the simultaneous shouts of "Reducto!" and "Stupefy." Within the dueling area four red streaks zoomed by each other as they headed toward their targets. The reductos had shattered both shields, leaving the stunners to do their work. The one that struck the auburn haired young man's best friend seemed to have little effect, other than causing the teen to droop. The stunner for Croaker however hit like a tone of bricks, causing a very much unconscious Master Unspeakable. The entire place was in silent shock over this, for no one had beaten Croaker in a very long time. In fact, no one even moved when the dueling shield came down, save for Luna, who was dragging Hermione over to the still conscious dueler. Once they reached him, both threw their arms around him and yelled loudly their congratulations. This seemed to break everyone else out of their silence, as clapping erupted.

Oddly enough, the sight of the three of his friends together didn't really bother Ron as much as most people would expect. For one thing, he was genuinely happy for his best mate. If anyone needed

encouragement and love, it was Harry. That two young women were stepping up to provide that was something that Ron was actually happy about. Oh, there was a slight pain in his chest over Hermione, but it was fading with each day. He had already realized he didn't have a claim over the bushy-haired young woman other than that of friendship. They had never gone out, or really did anything more than flirt. That was not the foundation of a relationship as the voice in his head had made that perfectly clear. But it was still hard sometimes, as was to be expected when a crush dies. Giving one last smile toward the trio standing there, he turned around and headed toward the showers in hopes to ease both his sore muscles and heavy thoughts.

After he was done soaking in the shower, Ron headed toward Team Gamma's team room. He half expected to see most of the others already gone toward the residential section, but was surprised to find Hermione sitting there reading. Ron closed the door and moved toward a corner of the area where he had left his book, remaining silent in hopes to not disturb his friend.

"Sun Tsu, what's wrong?" Hermione asked from behind her book. Her voice sounded concerned and slightly hesitant to him, as if she was nervous about this conversation.

Ron sighed heavily as he picked up his book. "Nothing Pheobe. At least there's nothing you can do about it. I'm not sure I'm ready to talk about it yet." Not that Ron had any hopes about that statement stopping this enquiry, but still he had to try.

"It's not nothing," the young lady replied consolingly as she set her book down on the table next to her. After folding her legs up under her she patted the chair next to her in open invitation. Knowing that his luck was running out, he complied. "Sun Tsu, you've been very quiet and withdrawn from everyone except Selene and to a very small extent Liber. We're your friends too, and Charlemagne and I are both worried about you. You can confide in us you know."

'Don't you snap at her twit? She's trying to help,' the voice echoed in his head before he could snap off a response. He closed his mouth

and took a deep breath and tried to relax before responding to her. "Phoebe, it's nothing you or Charlie has done. It's . . . well . . . I have a lot to figure out, and it's been a long road. I told you when you first asked, some things just aren't the same."

Hermione frowned at this explanation as her need to know everything about everything, combined with her intense caring caused her to overreact again. "No, I'm not going to just accept that and walk away, only to worry from afar. I don't know what has been up with you lately, but you're pulling away from your friends. You're pulling away from both Charlie and me, and we're both very concerned. That's something you're going to have to deal with, Sun Tsu."

Ron was taken aback by this to say the least. Truth be told, in some ways he liked the bossy streak his friend had, but in other ways it was a royal pain. This was one of those times for the later. But he knew better than to get angry, for he knew without that voice even speaking up that she was acting out of a deep concern for him. Not to mention he had been sending clues about his feelings toward her for some time, and she was probably acting on those feelings. That much his inner voice and he had discussed time and time again, especially after his first row with her when Harry was retrieved. So he clamped down on his knee-jerk response and decided to give her something, since he was not ready to discuss everything. "Fine Phoebe, I'll tell you some of the things on my mind, but I'm not ready to discuss all of it yet." He held up a hand to stop her from demanding more than that and continued. "Phoebe, I'm sorry but there are some things that people must hold in secret. I know you've got secrets, and so do I. I will promise you that before we go back to our own time I'll tell you and Charlie everything I can, okay?"

The bushy-haired teenager looked at her best friend for a moment and then nodded slowly. "Okay, if that's all you will give me, then that will have to do. But promise me that you'll confide in someone about whatever else there is that's bothering you, okay?"

This Ron could agree with wholeheartedly. Giving her a smile and a nod he readjusted himself so he could talk to her comfortably. "You remember the fight in the Department of Mysteries, right? Well, I don't remember if you saw what happened to me or not, but I was hit by an

inebriation spell. While under the influence of that spell I accioed some of those brains from the tank in the Magical Creatures room. One of them latched onto me.”

“But . . . “ Hermione started as a form of dread shock quickly came over her face.

“Yeah, I know. That was dangerous and could have cost me my mind, if not my life,” he said quietly with a great deal of seriousness. “It was in fact well on its way to sucking out every memory, feeling, and drive I had. I tried to fight it, but it was both powerful and relentless. Those were the most terrifying thirty minutes of my life. I don’t know how I managed to hold out against the brain, but I did. After that 30 minutes a couple of Unspeakables came up to me and stunned the brain with a localized stun spell. Thing is, it had already gotten into my head.”

Hermione looked like she was going to cry at this point. Instead she threw herself against her friend in a fierce hug, burying her head against his chest as the tears started to fall. She was at such a loss for words that for once she was incapable of saying anything.

Ron was rather uncomfortable with this, and rather hesitant about returning the hug. He looked down at his friend and had almost decided to not do anything when the voice started to chide him for it again. After a brief internal argument he simply held her loosely and stroked her hair as he continued. “One of the things Madam Pomfrey had done when we returned was a complete head scan, with the presence of another unspeakable. The damage was not as bad as they feared, but I was put on a potion regimen. Unfortunately the spells they had to use to get the brain off of me, combined with my mind having to defend itself, caused me some slight mental damage. Nothing too serious or anything. In fact, you’d probably consider it a blessing. It caused the part of me that wanted to be lazy and just slide by to have not so much of a voice as it once did. It also altered my perceptions of the world slightly, which in effect made me a bit more concerned about things like my future and the feelings of others. It’s almost as if my conscience was shaken up and given a voice.”

Hermione looked up at him and blinked for a moment, then leaned back so she could stare into his eyes. He knew he couldn't fool her completely, but with this mostly-true confession he was hoping he could at least get away with not telling her about the voice, at least not completely. "Oh Ron," he heard her say in a sorrowful but not pitying way, "I'm so sorry for you. While I did wish for you to take your studies and future a bit more seriously, and for you to think things through more, I could never wish for that to happen to you."

Ron looked around for minute to be sure no one heard that slip before giving her a slight admonishing glare. "Ryan, remember? Or Sun Tsu." Satisfied with her contrite look he then gave her a soft smile before continuing. "Thanks for the concern Haleigh, but I've been told time and time again everything will be okay. I just have to work through it all. At least there's some good things that have come from this," he said with a sad smile as she looked up at her.

"Oh, and what's that?"

"I'm able to see what's been rather obvious to just about everyone else all this time, but were afraid to call me on." He could tell she was getting the wrong impression from that statement by the hitch in her breath and the slightly conflicted look in her eyes. "Her . . . Ha . . . Phoebe, I need to apologize to you. I've been a pretty big prat toward you pretty much since I've met you. I know one apology can never make up for the way I've hurt you over the years, but I still need to say it."

Hermione's eyes narrowed slightly as she tried to discern something, what was anyone's guess. "Ry . . . Ro . . . What are you trying to say?"

Ron gently took Hermione's hand in his and couldn't help but to sign inside when she got that slightly shocked and panicked look in her eyes. "Nothing much more than an apology. Because of me and my self-centered attitudes, you nearly died in our first year. Because of me and my thickness, you were reduced to tears and hurt so much over the past that, upon reflection, I begin to wonder how you and I are friends. But then I look at you and Ha . . . Charlie, and I

understand. He's been the glue that has held this trio together, hasn't he? I realized it when you tore into me for trying to take you away from him when he was rescued from those relatives of his. You care a lot for him, and because he and I are friends, you let yourself be torn apart by me time and time again."

A gasp echoed throughout the room as the young woman in it squeezed his hand tightly and started to ramble of a protest, "No Sun Tsu, it's not like that . . . "

"Phoebe, I may not be the brightest wizard in our school, in fact I have been very thick," he interrupted her before she could feed his ego. "As that voice that is my conscience has told me time and time again, I let my Ego run all over the people I cared for the most. That is especially true of those that I have considered my closest friends: you and Charlie. When it wasn't my Ego, it was my jealousy. I even betrayed Charlie in our fourth year because of that jealousy. And even you can't deny that he and I have appeared to get along better than you and me." He waited for her confirmation on that point before continuing, "You are a very smart witch. You're not called the brightest witch in our age for nothing after all. Even I know that. And because of what happened, and the other matter I'm not ready to discuss yet, I took a look at everything I've done. By all rights, you should have slapped me our first year and never talked to me again. I'm very thankful you didn't though."

A soft chuckle escaped Hermione's lips at that comment. This encouraged Ron/ to continue. "Look, I know there were some good times between us, but with the things I've done the only reason you and I were around each other for those good times to happen is our mutual friendship with "Just Charlie." Neither you nor I wanted to leave him, so did everything we could to be friends with each-other. Charlie would never have it any other way. I even convinced myself I fancied you not so long ago. Not that you're not fanciable or anything," he said hurriedly to make sure he didn't insult her. "Any bloke would be lucky to have you fancy them. But . . ." He paused here, quite uncertain how to say what came next.

Hermione's face had been an interesting tableau of emotions through all of this, finally ending in an almost unreadable and cautious expression even as she prompted her friend. "But?"

Ron swallowed before looking up into his friend's eyes with the most sincere expression he could muster. "But what I was feeling was not fancying you. I like you as a friend, and now that I have taken a look at things, I wish to prove myself worthy of the title of "Best Friend." But what I was feeling at that time was rather childish of me. You don't fancy someone by thinking that you are getting something someone else couldn't. And that was a part of what I was feeling toward you. I don't feel that way any longer, mind you, but it was what I was feeling at the time. And you can't base a relationship on that." He prayed to Merlin she wouldn't slap him for that confession as he paused to gather his thoughts. When she didn't do so right away he took a bit of courage and looked down. "I know that probably just hurt you, and for that I'm sorry. I should have realized what I was doing long before this. But I will make you a promise now: I will be a better friend in the future to you, and I'll be there when you need someone to talk to, not that you'll want to talk about things like that to someone as thick as me, but . . . Will you give me another chance?"

Hermione took a few moments to close her eyes, apparently thinking of what Ron had just said. He knew it was a lot to take in, and he silently cursed his inability to say things without hurting her and others. He vowed to himself he would continue to work on expressing himself so he could talk without coming across as a git. Finally she opened her eyes and looked into his. "So what you're trying to tell me is that you like me, but not as girlfriend material, despite how you've been insinuating it for the past year?" Once he nodded to that she continued, "And that you're sorry for the arguments and insults. And that it was jealousy and not romantic interest that spurred you on to give me those hints in the first place?" Ron grew a bit worried at this as he watched her, unable to discern what he was thinking. Instead he remained silent as she continued, "I'm not sure how I should be feeling right now, to be honest. In one sense I'm rather glad that you discovered your true feelings before we had a big row and it blew up in our faces, but on the other hand I'm kind of hurt that you'd see me as some kind of prize, even if only temporarily. And to be honest there's a lot about my feelings, and not just toward you either, that

are quite frankly confusing me right now. And it's not a good confusion, at least I don't think so. I'm rather ashamed to say I was willing to use your feelings toward me as a security blanket against those thoughts. But without that I don't have anything."

Ron gave her hand a warm squeeze, for once thankful that the voice in his head was providing some information. "It sounds like we were headed toward a world of trouble then. I don't think you can base something like this on jealousy or avoidance, do you?"

At first it looked like Hermione was going to become indignant at that remark, but the truth of the comment quickly deflated her as she looked down. "I guess not. So where do we go from here? Do you still want to be friends?"

Ron nodded enthusiastically with a wide smile. "That would be great Herm . . . Phoebe. I know I wasn't the best friend you've had. That honor goes to Har . . . Charlie. But I will definitely be a much better friend than I had been. This I promise. I know from looking at you, Charlie and Athena that you've got a lot going on right now, so please remember that while I am still little thick I'm willing to be a sounding board."

Phoebe looked a little panicked when SunTsu mentioned Athena and Charlie, but that panic was quickly buried behind a mask of sweet sadness. "I don't know what you're talking about with Charlie and Athena, but thank you. I'll keep that in mind if something ever does happen." With this she stands up, then bends over to kiss Ron on the cheek in a sisterly kind of way. "And the same goes the other way, Sun Tsu. Whenever you are ready to talk about whatever else is bothering you, I'll be there." With this she turned, picked her book up, and left the team room, leaving Ron to sit and think about how much more denial his friends could take.

Department of Mysteries
Temporary Living Quarters
Room 2 (Girl's room)
Hermione POV

Hermione walked rather briskly down the corridors toward the temporary living quarters the girls shared, her head spinning. On one hand, Ron just told her he didn't care about her in the way she thought. Indeed, he had thought her some kind of trophy or something to get a hold of. It was rather obvious to her what he had meant. She was something that he could get that Harry couldn't. Never mind her own feelings or her own needs. The only thing that was salvageable by that is that he admitted it and woke up to what he was feeling. For that she'd give him a chance, but she was tired of the jealousy and the arguments. She was so tempted to tell him off and, while telling him she forgave him, promising a lot of pain if he ever intimated that again. She still could not understand how he could have thought anything remotely like that.

On the other hand she felt rather relieved that he had woken up and had let her down easy. That was the part she didn't want to think about though, for that led into rather dangerous territory. If Ron didn't like her in that way, then she was free to find real love. And every time she thought of true love her thoughts automatically went to either Harry or Luna. Either one was fraught with peril though. First there was Harry, her other best friend. She knew what he had gone through in his life, and more than what had happened in school. It was painfully obvious their first year that he was abused and starved at home. She was the daughter of dentists, and knew all the signs. But he never spoke of it, so she could never help him there. So she did her best to help him wherever and whenever she could. She tried to show him as much love as possible, even if it was a sisterly love. Oh, she had her crush on him as well, but the only way he ever saw her was as a sister. It had hurt at first, especially at the end of their third year, but she got over the pain. She swore she'd be there for him, and anyone she ever dated would have to accept that. Then the battle of the DOM had happened, and she saw how he looked when she got hit with that curse. Her heart broke at his pain, and she thought to try again. But that was dashed when he called Luna "love." But she couldn't give him up, so she swore to fall back to the sister role again, swallowing the pain.

By this time she reached the door to the girls' room, opening it a little hard. She was so distracted by her moods she had not noticed the other two girls were already here, along with some female

unspeakable named Sage. The three looked up and saw the look on her face before she started heading toward her bed. "Phoebe?" Luna called with no small amount of concern on her face. Luna was the last person she wanted to talk to, but not due to jealousy. She was always confused when she was around the younger teen, and right now confusion was the last thing she needed.

"I'm fine Athena," Hermione answered before walking over to her bed and throwing herself on it. The three other females in the room looked at each other briefly.

The next thing she heard was Sage's voice saying, "I need to go arrange a few things for your tests anyway. See you later Athena, Selene?" This was followed by the door to the room shutting, then silence.

Before long she felt two bodies sit on her bed, and a hand rubbing small circles up and down her back. Hermione sighed as tears rolled down her face. While it was impossible to hold the tears back, she swore to herself she would not sob. She really did not like the thought of the two younger women watching her cry, so she took some time to try to get under control. Finally schooling her voice into calmness she spoke, "Lilith, I'm fine, really. I just found out something that I didn't know, but suspected. I'm fine."

"Bullocks," Ginny's voice exclaimed. "My guess is my darling brother decided to apologize and confess to you, and you didn't like what he said."

Before Hermione could either confirm or deny Ginny's words, Luna's voice washed over her, "No Gwyneth, there's something more than that. Could you leave us alone for a bit please?" Hermione really hated that Luna could read her so easily. It made things even more difficult and confusing.

"It's okay, she can stay," Hermione spoke up in what she knew was a vain hope that it would cause Luna not to make her commentary about how happy she and Harry was with each other. She really didn't need to hear that right now. She knew from past experience

that she'd be fine once given a little time to re-process her emotions. She would be the best sister she could be to both of them and find someone else. It was as simple as that.

Unfortunately it seemed that Luna had different plans. "Okay, if that's what you want, I'll say what I need to say in front of her," Luna said in a voice that portrayed that she'd rather say this alone but would follow Hermione's wishes. "Did you read that book I gave you? The one on bonds in the Wizarding World?"

Hermione heard Ginny gasp at that question as if she was in shock. But she didn't want to look at her female best friend to confirm her suspicions, so she kept her head buried in the pillow. "Yes I did Luna. What about it?"

Luna's next words sounded a bit repentant and small, causing Hermione to snap her head up to look at the blond haired teen, who had her head bowed. "I lied to you during the last school year Hermione. A part of me was scared, for I have so few friends that I really can't afford to lose any. Another part of me was scared because I had, and still don't have, any idea how things will work. But you two, Halstead and you, taught me how to move forward with courage. Do you remember that shock you felt when I brushed up against your arm with my hand during the Rita interview?"

Hermione sat up to look at the girl for a few moments, her eyes seeking out the Ravenclaw's. She did remember that, and remembered they both agreed that it was nerves. She never felt nerves that so resembled a magical/electrical shock before, but the story they were hearing was rather gruesome, and to be honest, she was happy to accept that as an excuse. But why did the younger woman want to bring this up now? How could this help with her situation with Ron? She didn't understand this, and showed more confusion than she wanted in her face even as she agreed that she did indeed remember it. What did that incident have to do with anything?

Luna looked over toward Ginny for a few moments as if borrowing strength and support from her friend. Finally taking a deep breath she

turned her gaze toward Hermione and seemingly braced herself for a rough time. "What are the signs of a soul bond?"

Hermione's lips curled downward in concentration as she tried to remember what the book had said about the signs for a soul bond. "There are several stages, but the first is normally the most prevalent indicator. It is a jolt in both people the first time they touch each other's bare skin. From then on there's a slow takeover of each one's fantasies by the other person, a strong urge to be close to the person, and finally a gold glow when they first kiss in a romantic way." Even as she said this her mind went into over-drive as all the questions Luna had asked came together in her mind. But she couldn't accept it. "No . . . That's not possible. You're Harry's girlfriend," she said, admitting it for the first time aloud. "You had all the signs except the last. A soul bond is between two people and two people only." If she had bothered to look toward Ginny she would have become quickly disabused of that statement from the look of complete shock on the young red-head's face.

So instead Ginny, who figured things out just a few steps before Hermione had spoke up, "Wait. Do you mean you Harry and Her . . . a Triumvirate?"

Luna only nodded to this which sent Hermione into near panic. "But that's not possible," Hermione exclaimed with a rising anxiousness in her voice. "There hasn't been a recorded case of a Triumvirate bond in over a thousand years! I can't believe that Fate would be that cruel. I'm not bisexual or lesbian. And Harry doesn't see me in that way." This much she knew. Before Ron started to sniff around her, she had thought about pushing Harry in that direction, but upon closer inspection of his actions she had decided he would never see her in that way, at least until this summer.

Tears started to flow down Luna's face at this denial, her face showing the pain in her heart. "Haleigh, I knew the moment I touched you what was going on. I had already touched Halstead and experienced the exact same shock a couple of weeks prior. And you know what I am, right? It all fell into place when I touched your arm. There's nothing to be afraid of." The young woman sounded desperate, as if she was pleading with her.

But Hermione could not believe this and her world started to spin as conflicting feelings and thoughts erupted within her. 'A Triumvirate? No way! It can't be! I'm not interested in girls that way. I mean really, Luna is bright, caring, very attractive with nice hair. I wonder how her lips . . . GAH! No, it can't be!' These thoughts swirled in her mind as she thought and thought again, refusing to believe what she was hearing. Her heart however was desperately trying to convince her that it was true, but her mind refused to budge. Slowly she stood up, shaking furiously at the inner debate she was feeling. "I . . . I'm . . . I need to go," she said before pulling her hood up and running out of the room.

"Hermione!" was the last thing she heard Luna scream in pain and desperation as she tore her way out toward the apparition point and away.

Department of Mysteries
Temporary Living Quarters
Room 1 (Boy's room)
Harry's POV

Harry sighed as he slumped down in the chair in front of his desk. For the first time in a couple of weeks, he really didn't have anything to keep him occupied, so his mind began to wonder over what all had happened since the battle at the Ministry, just over a month subjectively. Some parts, like his near death and his conversation with Cedric left him wondering just who he could trust. Oh, he knew he could trust the five friends that came with him, of that he had no doubts. But beyond that? Dumbledore had too many fingers in his life for him to be truly trusting of anyone else. Too many people looked up to the man he himself had thought of as sort of a Grandfather figure. But there were too many things that had gone wrong for him to actually trust the man so blindly again. Sirius's death, the Dursleys, the avoidance, his confessions, the timing on telling him the prophecy, the list could go on to fill at least three feet of parchment. And the man had at least some part in almost all of them. After all, he controlled just about everything.

Well, everything that had to deal with influencing the masses that is. First, he was the Headmaster of Hogwarts. That position gave him control over what people thought and believed as they grew up. His choices there could literally dictate where the children could spend the rest of their lives. The most obvious example would be Snape and potions, but an even more illustrative example would be one that surprisingly Ron had pointed out: History. The students had as their teacher Binns, a ghost. A ghost so stuck in his rut that he didn't even know he died, he simply woke up and went about teaching after his death the night before. And all Binns ever really talked about were the Goblin Rebellions or any other historical event that put other magical sentient races in a bad light. And you only discovered this if you could stay awake during his class; something only a select handful of people could accomplish. Where did this leave the Magical Britain? Most people never really cared about their history, those raised in the muggle world never understood the magical, and everyone distrusted the other races. This was but one example, admittedly bad, where Dumbledore had control over what people thought and did.

The next example would be in his position as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot. As the Wizengamot combined both the judicial and legislative branches of Magical Britain, the Chief Warlock could reasonably get away with saying he was the law. Dumbledore's achievements gave him political power simply because he had demonstrated how much power he had magically. Combined with the Grandfatherly image and his political acumen pretty much insured that whatever Dumbledore wanted passed, would get passed. It was also the ideal place to ensure that whatever he said would be heard by the British Wizards. And as they were already conditioned by attending Hogwarts and by his victory over Grindelwald to believe him as the supreme leader of the Light, whatever he said was believed to be truly the best. Even Harry, if he were honest with himself, once believed that whatever Dumbledore thought was best, simply was best. But after his fifth year, the death of Sirius, and the Dursley fiasco, such beliefs were now and forever shattered. Never again would he be blindly trusting of the old man.

The third leg of his tripod of power was his weakest, but also at the same time the hardest to exploit by any British citizen: the position of Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards.

The ICW pretty much over-saw the entire Wizarding World, and Dumbledore was its leader. This would normally be a full time position for any other man, but not for the manipulative old man. But where he had absolute control due to his fame and his outward facade in magical Britain, that was not completely true in the ICW. First there were several countries in the world, most situated in the Western Hemisphere, that were very much dis-satisfied with the ICW and how it ran things. As Croaker pointed out just a couple of days ago, those countries who supported Technomancy were chief among them. Also several countries that were not part of the growing separatist movement also were not as completely trusting of Dumbledore as those within the UK were. But he still had enough power to pull anyone who tried to escape Britain back without too much hassle. Few countries could withstand the fines the ICW could impose for long, after all.

So a vast majority of Harry's problems had to do with an old man who could not leave him well enough alone. Who, through both non-subtle and subtle manipulations, had made what was already a bad situation a lot worse. But there was one problem he had that Dumbledore did not seem to have a hand in, primarily owing to the fact that the problem itself was very recent. Well, it wasn't a true problem per se, just that the situation could cause some problems. Harry reached into his top drawer and pulled out a book called Wizarding Bonds. In it contained information on nearly all of the ways two or more people can bond with others, either one or many. He opened the book to a marked page and read the passage again.

Soul Bonds

One of the most rare kinds of Bonds are the Soul Bonds. These bonds are often referred to as "matches made in heaven" or "people meant to be." This kind of bond occurs when two people are born as their magic or destiny (in cases of muggles, who also have this kind of bond) seek out and partially merge their souls together. This seeking happens when the younger of the two are born, regardless of space or time between them.

The partial merging of the two souls helps ensure that the two are totally compatible, not only in body but mind and spirit as well. Each

person is strongly urged to get along with each other, from first sight on. However, the first signal of this kind of bond is the first time a Soul Bonded pair touch each other on bare skin. A magical surge will jolt them both, causing a brief complete understanding between them. This helps facilitate their meeting and forces them to harmonize much more quickly than normal.

This leads to the second sign of a soul bonded pair, which occurs when a close relationship has started. Each partner will begin to feel what the other person feels. Whether it be anger, sadness, glee or other emotions, each partner will be able to not only tell when something is happening to the other, but what the person is feeling. This helps further the bond and prepares both for the final sign.

When a bonded pair kiss for the first time, a white or golden glow forms around the couple, dependent upon the power the both have combined. This is due to the merging of their cores and the final merging of their souls. At this point the bond is complete, and no force known to man can sunder it. They become immune to all forms of emotional coercion including love and lust potions, spells, and any mind attack meant to pit one part of a soul bonded pair against the other. This however is not without a price as neither person can outlive the other for longer than a few weeks, though often the death of the survivor instantaneously follows the death of their mate.

Note that during the second phase of the bonding process both people will lose any romantic interest they may have had outside of each other. The only known exception to this is the Triumvirate bond which, as its name suggests, is between three people. There has been only one documented case of this bond in recorded history, between Ignotus Peverell and his two wives. No other such bond has existed. It is for this reason that all Wizards and Witches are tested for bonds before they are registered within the Ministry of Magic, as soul bonds are considered protected by law.

Harry sighed as he closed the book and leaned back into his chair to stare at the ceiling. If this book was right, then he and Luna were soul bonded. While the green-eyed teen had no problem with that, and wouldn't have even before they touched, there was still something missing. From what he gathered from the passage he should be

feeling complete, but for some reason he was not. This concerned him and left him to wonder if he was actually Soul Bonded, or if there was something else at work, something a bit more sinister. He did not hold out that Dumbledore may have arranged something for them, like a marriage contract or something. According to the book, such contracts could, if the terms were written right, have a similar effect to the first two stages of the bonding. Unfortunately he had no way of knowing one way or the other until he looked his accounts up either at Gringotts or the Ministry in his own time. That however would be even more problematic as the "benign ruler" of Great Britain had probably sealed any such document away for "your own good." Sometimes Harry had to wonder just who was serviced by the old man's "greater good."

At this thought the door to the room entered and a short and slightly round young man came in, just obviously having come from the showers. This caused Harry to jump and quickly close his book even as he knew deep in his mind he would not be able to fool Neville with that kind of play. Still for forms sake he had to try. "Liber . . . Nathan, how was practice for you?"

Neville set his robes down on his trunk with a wide grin on his face as he turned toward his friend. Not too stealthfully he made his way over to Harry's desk and peered around the teen trying to block his sight. "Oh, it was okay Halstead. Not as exciting as yours, but not all of us can be aces in dueling. I'm happy enough though," the blond boy remarked before finding a chair of his own. "So . . . Luna's book is interesting, isn't it?" The young herbologist's grin just got bigger as he leaned back to enjoy the show in front of him.

'Sometimes I wish he wasn't quite so confident,' Harry thought to himself as he gave up any semblance of being able to hide his thoughts on this matter. He could feel his cheeks warm as his entire face seemed to blush. "Er . . . yeah." A nice noncommittal answer was just what the doctor ordered. He could only hope that his friend would take the hint and change the subject of their conversation.

Unfortunately Neville was apparently rather enjoying having the opportunity to tease someone else about something. Everyone knew he'd never go as far as the people he teased him unmercifully did, but

it had to feel good not to be on the receiving end. "So find out what she wanted you to know yet?" he asked innocently.

Harry just had to award that extra remark with a squirm as an even deeper shade of red roared into his face. "I think so . . ." he said uncertainly. "I mean, I have a good idea, but there are a couple of things that still confuse me." Harry finally realized it would be better just to say it than have his friend drag it out of him piece-meal. When he saw Neville's arched brow the blushing young man continued. "I don't know quite how to describe it, but it's almost as if something was just a bit off, you know?"

Neville tilted his head to the side in confusion and blinked a couple of times as he apparently tried to figure out just what Harry was talking about, "Not really mate. What do you mean?"

"Well . . . I'm not sure I can rightly explain it. Part o f me thinks it is a good idea to talk to Luna about it. It really concerns her after all." Looking up Harry saw his friend's head nod up and down in both agreement and understanding.

"That sounds like a good idea mate. If I'm seeing things correctly she'll be able to help you out on this. But . . ." Neville stopped talking for a moment and furrowed his face, evidently trying to decide on something.

"But?"

Neville took a deep breath and then looked at Harry in sympathy, "Halstead, I know I've said this before, but I think your life will never be really considered normal. There have been times in the past that I've commented, not around you of course, that you never seemed able to catch a break. You say there's something missing, right? Well talking to Luna, who I know is pretty much an undeclared girlfriend, will only be the first step for you. I've read that book, and I think she knows exactly what is going on, and is working on it. But she can't do it alone. She needs your help mate. Just do me one favor, okay?" At Harry's nod he stood up and walked over to within a few inches of the boy-who-lived's face, looking him directly in the eyes as he said,

“Don’t let your desire to be normal blind you. If you feel incomplete, then its because there’s something you’re missing. I’m not at liberty to say what, though I do have a very good idea of what it is. Just trust Luna, and accept what she says. It may very well be she’ll need your help to set things right for both of you.”

“What do you mean both of us?” Harry asked, both impressed by Neville’s earnestness and at the same time confused.

“Let’s just say you probably aren’t the only one feeling like there’s something missing, and not through any fear or dissatisfaction with you. She likely feels the exact same thing.”

Harry was about to ask what Neville was talking about when the door to their room opened to reveal their other male friend, Ron. The red-head poked his hooded head in, looking a bit concerned. “Charlie, Selene just told me to come get you. Apparently Athena and Phoebe were having a discussion and Phoebe ran off pretty upset. Athena went after her, but the wards here said they both left the Ministry grounds.”

Both wizards sitting down looked at each other in shock, then they stood up and donned their cloaks. “Okay Liber, Sun Tsu and Selene will stay here in case Phoebe comes back. I’ll go find Athena, and help her find Phoebe. Stay on standby in case I call.” With this Charlemagne quickly made his way out of the living quarters and up toward the apparition point. “Liber, you’re in charge of the rest of the Team!” he called out as he left at a run.

Harry got up to the door room to find Jason standing there waiting for him. Anticipating his boss’s question the teen said as he approached, “We all have to go out sometime. They both know what’s at stake, so I trust them not to divulge their identities, but I have an emotionally upset young witch to calm down.”

Jason looked a little relieved when he heard the first part before growing serious at the second. “Just be careful. It might be better if you duck and change your robes to something a bit more conducive

to being out in public when you get there. That way we don't have Unspeakables wandering the street in uniform causing panic."

Harry could understand this and nodded as he passed the man. He needed to get going, and he knew that his boss would be able to understand everything the silent affirmation actually meant. A short ride up the elevator later and he was moving through the lobby toward the apparition point. People dodged out of the way of the speedily moving unspeakable, as normal workers rarely wanted to disturb one of these people while they were obviously on important business.

Flourish and Blotts
Diagon Alley
London England
Luna's POV

Luna had to give Hermione credit, she sure could run. And given that the woman was actually smarter than Luna, it meant that she would have a hard time finding her. Well, normally. Even going to a big bookstore like this, which anyone who knew Hermione would go to first thing, it would be easy to miss someone you would be searching for in here. The clerks wouldn't necessarily notice any one specific person, and there would be no way for anyone to cover all the rows and cases all the time. This place was big enough that the entire team couldn't do it without some kind of edge. Fortunately for her though, Luna had that kind of edge. Even though her female bond mate was denying it, she could feel her unhappiness, and could pinpoint rather quickly where she was. She could only hope that Ron had gotten a hold of Harry, for it would take the both of them to get Hermione to accept this. And she thanked her lucky stars he had started to accept their connection already, even if they hadn't talked about it yet. But then, Harry was fairly much open to any sign of love he could get. He wasn't needy per se, but he would respond like a sponge to any kind of love.

Hermione, on the other hand, had known love in her life. At the very least the love of a parent toward a child. Even though her childhood wasn't easy, and Luna suspected she had the same kind of problems before Hogwarts that Luna had during Hogwarts, she did at least

have some basis for love. But what pained Luna to no end about Hermione's life was that Hermione never lost the need for peer recognition as she herself nearly completely did. Besides Ginny,

Luna had no friends at Hogwarts until last year when Harry stepped into her life. She was used to the jeers and the taunts, and hid behind the fairy world. And since even most magical people would not believe what they couldn't see or feel, she was dubbed Looney. It did hurt at first, but she soon numbed to that. Then Harry came, and accepted her for who she was, fairies and all. It was funny that her life mirrored Hermione's so well, with the exception of location, but produced two opposite witches. Perhaps it was the differences in the worlds they grew up in that had made the difference? That would be an interesting study for the Quibbler when she got back. In the meantime, she finally found her friend in a remote corner of the store, and gave a silent nudge to her male bond-mate, who was looking for them both.

"Haleigh?" Luna asked quietly so as to not startle several minutes off the older teen's life. Her friend jumped at the voice, having not heard or felt her approach. To watch this was painful to Luna. Something had to be done, and soon.

"Lilith, please go away," the curly haired young woman asked. Luna cheered that she wasn't so totally distraught that she wasn't able to remember to use her other name. But the cheer was short lived as the pain she could feel from the other woman seemed to increase. All Luna wanted to do was to hug the woman and make the pain go away, but she knew that hugging her bond-mate right now would be the wrong thing to do. Even touching her would not help.

"I'm afraid, Haleigh. You don't know how scared I am right now," she confessed instead. "I don't like this. I have spent years hiding behind the fairy world to avoid this kind of pain, and yet I can't escape it. I suppose no one can, really." Slowly she moved toward the seat next to Hermione's, but instead of sitting in the chair she leaned against it to look at the books. "I wish . . ."

She could tell Haleigh was surprised by the confession, which fueled her curiosity. That in and of itself would be the saving grace here. "You wish?" Hermione asked, as if wondering what the younger girl would be wishing for now.

"I wish I could take all your pain away," Luna confessed quietly. Hermione jerked back, but Luna was not going to let her run again. "Wait, please let me finish this time, okay?" She could tell Hermione was scared, but since Luna hadn't moved, she would stay and listen to the younger witch. "The feelings I have for you notwithstanding, I wish I could take away your pain. So many things have changed for you in the past month, haven't they?" At Hermione's reluctant nod she sighed. "Look, I remember you telling me about your parents reactions, and what you were and are feeling. It's no wonder you're scared. I was when I watched my mother die right in front of me. It's why I can see thestrals, you know. You've grown up with a loving family, and you don't want to lose them."

"And you won't," a male voice spoke up from a short distance away, causing Hermione to jump again. Luna had sensed him walk up, and sent a feeling of gratitude his way. "Haleigh, I may not have known your parents nearly as well as you do, but I can tell a lot about them, simply by looking at you. You're more loyal than most Hufflepuffs to those you care about, much like me. You had to get that from somewhere. I got it from starving for love and kindness," Harry chuckled and held up his hand. "No, please don't argue this point. I've read more books on the effects of child and emotional abuse than you have, I can guarantee that. You had a loving family. I know a little about your childhood, and know it wasn't a pleasant one. But your parents stuck by you no matter what, even when you defied them, right?" Hermione reluctantly nodded, and Harry continued, "Then they won't give up on you now, no matter what."

Luna spent this time with Harry talking not only helping him gather his thoughts, but looking around at the book store. She watched as some curious people seemed to move closer to the trio, their heads tilted to one side to allow them to hear them better. She shook her head and knew they need to leave soon, preferably to some place within the alley where they could talk amongst themselves quietly. So as Harry

finished his speech, she stopped leaning on the chair and looked first at Hermione, then Harry. "Let's head to the ice cream shop. We can get some sugary goodness and talk this out like the near adults we are."

Harry seemed to agree with this as he turned toward Hermione. He gave her a consoling smile in hopes of comforting the distraught witch down. "That sounds like a good idea. Coming Haleigh?"

Hermione, for her part, seemed torn. On one hand the last person she wanted to talk to was Luna as her presence only tore further at the wall keeping her feelings for the younger teenage at bay. Luna could sense this and had decided that now was the time to push, with Harry, and try to get the first generation witch to open herself up to the possibility. If she worked it right, she could get the bond between her two bondmates to open up as well, which could only help. Finally after some internal deliberation Hermione had apparently decided she was not going to get out of this without hurting either of her friends. "Okay, I guess that will be fine."

Floean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour
Luna's POV

The two young women and Harry eventually made it to the Ice Cream shop, where a much younger Floean Fortescue was running the business. It was evident that the place had just opened not that long ago from the lack of customers the place had. Still, it was a good place to sit and talk, where silencing spells and an out of the way corner could, in theory, provide as much privacy as being in public could give. Thankfully they each kept up their disguises, so they would be safe from partial recognition by anyone but the other three that came with them. Harry, for instance, had a rounder face, very light brown hair and brown eyes. Hermione was sporting a more red-headed look with green eyes and a more angular face. Luna had fallen somewhere in between with normal-looking hazel eyes and strawberry blond hair. The only thing none of them could do anything about was Harry's scar, but the new hairstyle he used kept it from being seen all that much.

After they all had ordered, Luna decided it was time to take the snorkack by its crumpled horns, so to speak. "Okay, I think for one we need to clear the wrackspurts out of our heads. Now the only way to do that is to face these issues straight on, and discuss them one at a time. I'll begin if you don't mind." After waiting to be sure that the other two did agree, again with Hermione doing so reluctantly, she smiled sadly and continued, "Have either one of you wondered why I gave you that book to read? Well, its because there's a portion of that book that is very much relevant to this situation. First thing, Halstead, I feel the same way toward you as you feel about me," the last part was said shyly, but with conviction. Harry looked ready to say something, but she decided to continue on before he could. "There's a section in there on soul bonds. That shock you and I felt when you placed your hand on my shoulder during that practice session was the first stage of that. You touched my throat, and we were both shocked by the contact. Since then you and I have gotten closer, I can feel it, and I've never been happier."

Harry's eyes had grown as big as Luna's were normally by this information. It was one thing to suspect that something was true, it was quite another to have it confirmed. "I can honestly say I've come to really care about you as well," he said shyly. "When things have come so grave and serious that I thought I was going to drown, you were there, even if just in thought. You have helped me a lot already, more than you know. When I nearly died, I heard two voices pleading with me to come back. I now recognize one of them was yours. Those voices enabled me to come back, especially after my talk with Cedric. It's been hard back here, but I've been happier than before, and you are a large part of that happiness." Harry was looking intently at his ice cream as he explained this. He was unused to talking about his feelings in anything remotely resembling confidence, the Dursleys had done too much. But what he said was a major concession, so Luna rewarded it with a smile.

Hermione on the other hand looked almost shattered. Luna could tell that what Harry had said, which was the closest thing he ever came to saying he loved someone, had all but shattered the older witch. With this in mind Luna continued, first addressing Harry then Hermione, "Thank you Halstead. I know what that took, and I care deeply for you as well. As I said, I feel the same way you do, and not

just about our feelings for each other. You care for me, and will very much likely never leave me, but at the same time there's something missing, isn't there?" She smiled sweetly at Harry's shock and reached over to take his hand. "Remember what I said Harry. I understand, but unlike you I know what is missing, for it's not missing to me. At least not completely"

This was apparently enough for Hermione, who shot up out of her seat with another panicked look on her face. "I . . . I'll . . . I'll leave you alone now." With this she started to turn, but didn't get any further before Harry's other hand shot out and grabbed hold of Hermione's. At that moment there was a flash of their auras as the missing pieces each had found the other and surged forth to finish the bonding. Both of Luna's friends expressions instantly changed as the jolt of energy rushed through them, shocking them.

Luna on the other hand was filled with a warm sense of belonging, falling over her like a thick wool blanket during a bitter winter's day. Her grin widened and became ecstatic as the feelings of home spread throughout her. The last bond of the Triumvirate had finally been established, and offered a security nothing else could ever compare to, much less touch. She reveled in the feelings of warmth and belonging, truly happy for the first time in a long time. Finally things were starting to come together. Oh, she knew there would be a long road yet, but at least the journey was started.

Harry looked shocked, but at the same time strangely accepting. But then again, Luna knew he had feelings for his female best friend. She had accepted it a long time ago. It was one reason she had looked at him from afar, because she knew that in his heart Hermione would always be so important that no one else could ever hope to remove her. But now he realized what was going on, and he looked both relieved and full of wonder. "It was you," he said softly to Hermione as he pulled her back toward him. "The other voice I heard, calling me to come back, it was you. The love in your voice, the desperation and pain, it made me respond Haleigh. It made me scared to leave you. Please . . . please stay. We, the three of us, can work this out."

Hermione blinked as she looked first to Harry, then to Luna. "But . . . it's impossible. We can't be . . . "

“Yes we can,” Luna finally said as she stood up and took a couple of steps around the table toward her female bond mate. “There’s nothing in that book that said it was impossible Haleigh. Just because something is rare doesn’t mean it doesn’t happen at all. It’s happened, and I for one couldn’t be happier. You mean the world to me Haleigh. You and Halstead both hold a piece of my soul, what is my heart compared to that? The proof is incontrovertible, the feelings from that skin contact prove it. And I know you feel my feelings. I’ve felt yours for a couple of months now.”

Hermione was normally a very intelligent girl. She had perhaps a more complete encyclopedic knowledge of just about everything than any other witch or wizard Luna had ever known. In fact, sometimes she let her book knowledge over-ride the facts as they were presented, and she got lost. She really wasn’t known for her off-the-chart thinking, but the thing was this wasn’t totally off-the-chart. Even though she had already read about this, her heart rebelled at the concept it could be happening to her. It became plainly obvious she was panicking, and her childhood beliefs were strangling her. In fact, the rather intelligent girl took a step back, her hand slipping out from Harry’s.

Harry had a curious expression on his face. Luna could tell he was happy and feeling complete, but the consistent refusal on Hermione’s part was slowly but surely tearing at his heart. Luna could sympathize, for she had been feeling the same. Slowly Luna reached out and took Harry’s hand, and reached out toward Hermione’s. Harry mirrored her and spoke, “Haleigh, it will be okay. Whatever’s wrong we can work through. Please don’t run again.”

“You don’t understand!” Hermione exclaimed even as her body was shaking. Both others could feel her very being in a battle with itself, one that was threatening to tear her apart. Both Harry and Luna took a small step toward her, reaching out to gently touch her. That was all the book-inclined woman could take however, so she turned to run. In that moment each teen could feel their hearts starting to break as their vision dimmed around the edges.

Suddenly a great weight fell upon them all, and time itself seemed to stop. Everyone froze save for the three players in the drama. They could move, but it was sluggish as if they were wading through molasses. A loud shrill echoed through the area, followed by a strange discordant crackling sound that seemed to originate from a few feet in front of Hermione. This caused all three teens to freeze until a loud booming SNAP was heard. Then just as suddenly as it stopped time resumed again, and all three felt as if strings that had been holding them up were cut. They fell to the ground in three heaps, unable to move. Two loud shrills echoed in the shop as a large ball of fire and an equally large ball of ice appeared where the shrill first rang out. Both balls exploded to reveal what could only be two phoenixes.

Immediately the area filled with phoenix song as both magical birds sung in harmony. The sound infused the area, calming down each member of the trio and bolstering their love. Even Hermione, who's heart was at war with her mind and beliefs, felt more at ease. This allowed her mind to re-assert itself and thus allowing her to feel what her soul was trying to do. Indeed, it felt as if her soul was trying exert its influence with the sense of completeness she felt being around and touching both Luna and Harry. She could almost hear words that were sung in phoenix song within her soul, bolstering her true feelings. All of this was evident on her face as she turned and looked toward Luna with tears in her eyes. Luna, happy to both see this and feel this, reached out and for the first time today touched the auburn haired woman's face to wipe away the tears. For once, Hermione didn't flinch.

And then, as if both phoenixes were happy with this, the song stopped. The effects lingered within their souls however, allowing Luna to continue to softly caress Hermione's face. "Its okay Haleigh," Luna said softly. "Love is blind you know. As long as you have love, everything else can be worked out." She was awarded with a soft and shy smile from Hermione, one that warmed the hearts of both her and Harry.

It took quite a few minutes for the trio to compose themselves, but it was a few minutes that were well worth it. Finally Harry was the first to stand as he offered his hands to Hermione, who gratefully accepted so she could stand up. Then she turned toward Luna and

offered her hand, which cheered Luna tremendously as she was helped up. By silent agreement they started to return toward their seats, only to find the sight they had missed a few moments before sitting before them.

On the back of Hermione's seat a scarlet and gold phoenix sat, looking at her both patiently and expectantly. The bird and the lady each stayed where they were for a few moments before the formerly-bushy-haired witch reached out a hand to scratch behind its ears. "Hello Fawkes," she said quietly. The phoenix seemed to chide the young woman however, something that Luna found privately funny. But her female bond-mate simply blushed and said, "Okay, Gabriel, I understand." The red phoenix bobbed his head once and turned his head toward where Harry was sitting. As if pulled on strings both Hermione and Luna looked toward Harry and received yet another shock.

There, perched on the back of Harry's chair was a blue and white phoenix with deep amber eyes. This in itself was unusual as most ice phoenixes had cool blue eyes. Harry was staring at her in wonder with his hand shakily reaching out to touch the phoenix. Suddenly the phoenix shot her head out to bump Harry's hand with her head. Luna could tell he was resisting the attempt to reach out and hug the rare bird to him. "Hedwig," he said softly with great emotion. The phoenix crooned in response, and Harry just had to chuckle as she nipped his fingertips. "Desdemona then," he said respectfully. "What . . . How did you get here?"

That question was responded to by both of them as they started to sing in concert. Suddenly darkness over-took the three of them as the world dropped away. Then another scene took its place, and they were in a wood full of phoenixes of all kinds. None of them had ever heard or seen this place before, so the humans were a bit awed. The scene seemed to speed up as Hedwig the owl and Fawkes flew in from seemingly nowhere. The scene followed them until they reached a clearing. There in the clearing was the biggest and brightest Phoenix any of them had ever seen perching on a boulder. Somehow they could hear the phoenixes speaking as it was explained to Hedwig just how grateful they were for her freeing Fawkes. A reward was offered, and Hedwig seemed to know exactly what she wanted.

Another few barks sounded as Hedwig responded, followed by a crooning noise from the Head Phoenix. Hedwig barked once more, and suddenly the entire area was filled with phoenix song the likes of which no one could ever remember. Every phoenix in the area glowed in a veritable rainbow of colors. Hedwig herself started to glow blue with a light that quickly blinded the other three. Finally the light cleared and there stood Hedwig in her current incarnation.

Another conversation took place as the newly transformed Hedwig and Fawkes started to tell the tales of both Harry's Life and world events. Strangely enough, nothing was touched about Dumbledore's manipulations, or what he was up to. Although in retrospect it wasn't necessary since the state of the world was bad enough. Finally Fawkes told the Head Phoenix about the prophecies which mentioned Harry Potter. The entire area suddenly filled with challenging shrieks, which was only calmed by the Head Phoenix's song. A short while later both Fawkes and Hedwig were off again, this time disappearing the same way they had appeared to the trio, in fire and ice.

The scene then faded, followed by a return of Diagon Alley just how they left it. The three looked at each other, then back at the Phoenixes. "I guess we have new allies," Luna said aloud in that dreamy voice she normally used. Both of her bondmates turned toward her which caused her to giggle. "Now you know what causes this voice," she responded to their unspoken question. This broke the ice and they all shared a good laugh, which apparently relieved the new familiars. The three then sat down and started to compose themselves by spending a few minutes complaining about melted ice-cream.

Finally Hermione took a deep breath and screwed up her courage. "Okay, you both win," she said quietly. "I should have known I couldn't resist both of you. But . . . But I'm still scared, and a bit uncertain," she confessed. As if in reaction to unspoken arguments she quickly replied, "Not uncertain about wanting to be with both of you, but uncertain about . . . I don't quite know how to say it. I guess a small part of me doesn't want to accept that I could be attracted to, much less involved in this kind of thing. But please keep up on me. I . . . I guess what I'm trying to say is that it will be a while before I'm

completely comfortable. I promise to keep trying. Just give me a bit of time, okay?"

Luna reached out to touch Hermione's shoulder, ignoring the slight flinch from the other red-head. She saw that Harry once again took Hermione's hand as he responded, "Okay Haleigh. I can understand what you're saying, believe it or not. We'll wait forever if needs be. Would it be permissible to hope that it doesn't take forever though?" he asked wagging his eyebrows.

That seemed to break the ice as Hermione both laughed and threw herself into a hug that threatened to squeeze the air right out of Harry. Luna, exclaiming that it looked like fun jumped on both of them and hugged them both hard. They stayed that way for a few moment before they could hear a clearing of a throat behind them. Luna, being outermost, turned around to look behind her and nearly fainted.

There was a small family behind them, one that looked very familiar to Luna. The children Luna recognized almost instantly recognized from pictures. One child had messy black hair, hazel eyes and wore glasses that looked very familiar. The other one was rather aristocratic looking with longer black hair and gray eyes. The two boys did not look related, though by looking at how they stood they were rather close. The older man looked to be related to the hazel-eyed boy, and by the way the woman stood by the man's side, she was probably his wife. Luna sat there in shock (they had fallen to the ground during the group hug) as she recognized just who these people were.

Harry seemed curious, and only in slight shock as the boys looked very familiar to him. He couldn't place it though, at least not at the moment. He started to his feet, helping up the two ladies as he did. Finally he stood tall and bowed his head slightly toward the older man. "My apologies if we were disturbing you sir, we were going through quite an emotional moment." Harry's voice was kind but formal, something obviously learned from Neville.

The man seemed both vaguely taken aback and at the same time curious about the trio, so much so he stood their silent for a few moments before his wife lightly nudged him in the ribs. "I can see that

young man,” the older man said while closely inspecting them. “I would remind you this is a public place and as such is not normally a place one would expect such a spectacle. But given the sudden appearances of two phoenixes, as well as the relief I can see you all feel, such can, barely, be understandable. You would do better to find someplace private for such discussions.”

The older man seemed friendly enough, though Luna was still rather flabbergasted. “Are you okay?” she heard the woman ask in a concerned tone. Luna could only nod as the woman came forward to inspect her more closely. “It looked like you were upset earlier, just before the phoenixes arrived. Then you were frozen before you almost fell over. Are you sure? What’s your name?”

“Now Grace . . .” the older man cautioned, only to be ignored by his wife as she continued to fire question after question at Luna. The man sighed and turned toward Hermione and Harry and apologized, “I’m sorry, she’s the kind that likes to help people who have problems. She doesn’t mean to be intrusive.” He then chuckled as the woman stuck her tongue out at him, then shook his head and extended his hand. “Charles Gregory Potter. This is my son James, and his friend Sirius Black. My wife is Grace Amelia Potter. And you are?”

The two younger strangers casually waived at the trio, then grinned widely as both Harry and Hermione looked like they were struck on the back of their heads by a boards. Harry did his level best to avoid his eyes bugging out, but it took a few moments for him to regain control. Finally he started to cough as the family looked at him with concern. “I’m sorry, but I’ve heard of your family, and you were rather well thought of by my parents. I grew up wondering what it would be like to meet you.” Luna had to be impressed, for it was all exaggerated truth, but enough truth to avoid suspicion. “I’m Halstead Jeremiah Penwell, this is Haleigh Joyce Galway, and the strawberry bond who is standing by your wife is Lilith Leedham.”

Now it was the family’s turn to pick their jaws up off of the floor, though Luna could not begin to figure out why. She saw the wrackspurts were avoiding the area, thanks to the phoenixes, but for some reason this family looked very surprised. The old man then did something even more suspicious and started to inspect the area as if

expecting something to jump out at any moment. The boys were still awed, while Grace seemed to grab his arm. "Charles," she said quietly but urgently. This is one reaction that the Trio did not expect, and had Harry releasing his wand from his holster quickly.

That action finally started James out of shock as he pulled his, but kept it trained in any direction but the trio's. "We won't hurt you," the young man said quietly but sincerely, any trace of amusement gone, replaced with a cautious determination.

"Penwell you say?" Charles finally said as he turned his gaze. "You're brave my boy, to be using your true name in public." This confused Luna so much she searched the futures concerning the name, and paled. "Ha . . . Halstead," she said urgently. Harry turned his gaze toward her at the sound. She silently thought as hard as she could, 'There's something wrong with the name Penwell. It's got a history. We need to trust these people. It's the only way we'll survive.' Both Harry and Hermione nodded as Harry turned his attention toward Charles.

"I'm sorry, my family has been out of circulation with the rest of the British Magical society for a while now. I wasn't aware there was a problem between my family and society?"

Charles blinked at the younger man and shook his head as his confusion grew. "It is not safe to use that name in public, milord. To answer your question, the name has been all but forgotten save by a certain very select group of people. It may be perfectly fine to use the name, but you need to be aware . . . Do you have time to come with us to a place much more private? I can explain, but not here."

Luna shook her head as she looked up at the sky and nudged Harry to look upward. As he did he shook his head with a look of regret. "I'm sorry Lord Potter, but not today. We are expected back at the place we're staying very soon, and there could be problems if we don't get back."

Lord Potter looked like he wanted to say more, but quickly gave in. "Very well, Mr. . . . Halstead?" With a nod from the addressed young

man he continued. "Can you meet with me soon? Please? It is very important."

Harry considered this and then nodded. "Yes. Sunday we'll be free to visit if that is fine with you."

Charles looked shocked at the trust, but noted Luna's expression and seemed to make a conclusion. "That will be fine. Please go to Gringotts around 10 A.M. and ask to see Slicktooth. He'll arrange transportation to our family manner. Would that be acceptable?"

Very soon arrangements were made, Charles and Harry shook hands, and the rest of the family said their good-byes. The two groups then quickly parted ways. As the trio got out of site he motioned for them to don their cloaks so they could head back. Just before they apparated away, Harry said, "Hermione, see if any of the books in the DOM libraries can find anything on my name please? This doesn't sound good."

Chapter 5: Names and History

DOM Research Library
Ministry of Magic
London, England
July 26, 1975
Harry's POV

Harry sat at the table with Luna and Hermione as the trio raked over a pile of books on Wizarding Genealogy that laid strewn out between them. Besides studying for their OWLs and training, the three had spent every minute they could in the library trying to find references for the name Penwell. They had found several references, but so far everything seemed to be a dead end. Harry paused and sighed as he set his book down to look over at the two people with him: Hermione and Luna. Hermione, he always knew, somewhere in the back of his mind, he'd end up with her. Somehow, he knew she'd always be an important part of his life. He honestly, from the moment he met her, knew that if there was ever to be anyone who would love him for him, she would. He doubted he'd ever find someone that he'd love though, for he didn't even know what love was. The love of his parents was something that he could only just barely remember, and taken away long before he could experience it fully.

If truth was to be told, there were times he silently railed against that lost, and against the people who cost him everything. Voldemort . . . Wormtail . . . Snape . . . The last he didn't really know for sure how he fit, but his gut was telling him he was responsible as well. And then there was Dumbledore. So many secrets, so many lies. So much the man could have done but didn't. There was a special place in hell for the old man, and Harry would for one love to see him there. Any love or respect Harry had for the man had died along with him at the Dursleys, only that love never made it back. It was enough to send him into depression, something he had been fighting ever since his fourth year. If it weren't for his friends, especially the two here, he was sure he'd never have done half of what he's done since he woke up. His soul cried in rivers of sorrow, and only his friends, along with his two loves, could save him from that.

But Hermione, as much as he thought he loved her, and as much as she had a part of his soul, was not enough to save him by herself. She was the thinking intellectual, and the rationalization he so needed to see through the fog of lies that surrounded his childhood. Yes, she had feelings, and felt with all of her being, but those were not her strengths. She was sometimes lost in her emotions, and when that occurred, she couldn't really help him. But she was very much necessary to him, much like breathing was. If he lost her, he would not want to survive, and probably would not want to. She held the foundation, but could not build upon it to make him whole again. Keeping him sane was about all Hermione could do, for she lacked . . . something. Harry could not figure out what. She was only so strong, and would eventually break if she had to do this alone.

Fortunately, Hermione and Harry were not alone. The third piece of the puzzle, and the piece that both gave Hermione strength and him healing, was the strawberry blond that was with them: Luna. He knew from the moment they first touched that she somehow completed him. At first he thought she only looked at Hermione that way. He couldn't understand, and didn't see her look at him the same way. So at first he didn't understand anything. Her emotions were a mystery, her motives were pure enough but clouded to him. When he was with Luna he felt unhurried, serene, and uplifted. When he was with her there was this aura of peace that acted like armor against the cruel games of this world. Voldemort could not enter, Wormtail's betrayal didn't have that sharp bite, Snape's taunts were so much wind, and Dumbledore's manipulations were proved meaningless. Where Hermione provided the foundation, Luna provided the brick and steel, shaping him into the man he wanted to be.

It was from these two witches that Harry began to taste real love. Not only the passionate love of a pair of lovers, but the unconditional warmth of deep affection and trust. Their love had begun to fill a pit within him that had long since been sandblasted and left bone dry. He soaked up all the love they could give him, though sometimes he was never sure that would be enough. He knew he was, in truth, needy for love. He knew the scars he carried from his past would be a long time in healing, but for the first time there was hope for someone like him. For the first time he felt, if not happy, then on his way to being so.

But like any journey worth its while, the road to happiness would be a long and bumpy one. The catalyst for his relationship, the Triumvirate bond, could not be denied. He could feel their souls, and they could feel his. The bond had not progressed to the point yet where they could feel everything, or hear every thought, but it was there, and growing. Hermione could no longer deny it, not after the sign that sealed her bond to him. She was still largely uncertain, but at least she was no longer fighting it. The only question was, as far as he was concerned, why it only happened now. By all rights they should have had that sign ages ago, back in his second year. Hermione was confused on this question as well, for even if you took into account that the petrification she suffered could have blocked it (though no one could figure out how that would work), their third year would definitely have triggered it when they saved Sirius. So why did it not happen then? There was a question that had taken both Luna and Hermione, Seeress and Arithmancer, sometime to figure out.

The solution to why it took so long was rather simple, and thus was easily overlooked: Harry's emotional damage. During the first five years of his time at Hogwarts, he was partially crippled, at least emotionally. The Dursleys had intended to cure him of his magic by abusing him, swearing to put an end to it. His emotional development was therefore stunted, and had taken some time to develop to the point he could accept this kind of love. Luna's soul bonded first when his soul first started to wake up in that way, and shored him up so he could accept Hermione's as well. So in a way they had almost succeeded, but the love of his two bondmates would be enough to heal him.

Not for the first time he wondered what Dumbledore was playing at, putting him there. After the DOM raid, the headmaster told him "the power he knows not" was love. Harry had yet to make sense out of that statement, and would have dismissed it entirely except deep in his soul he knew it to be true. If that was the case, then putting him with a family like the Dursleys was the worst possible thing in the world to do, wasn't it? A loveless home, where love died at the hands, feet, and frying pans of the people that should have loved him most. Most anyone would have learned quite the opposite in such an environment. That's exactly what happened with Tom Riddle after all.

So that again raised the question: Why the Dursleys? If he was the only person who could save the Wizarding world, or at least the leader of the group that would, then why risk it by sending him to hell on earth? Did Dumbledore want him to fail? Or did he want Harry to win against Voldemort only to die at the Dark Wanker's hands? Somehow the last did not feel quite right. If the statement Dumbledore made in his second year was to be believed, Harry was one of the descendants of Gryffindor. And while the supposed Boy-Who-Lived knew next to nothing about the Four Founders, there had to be some kind of following for them. He saw it year after year as young students were arranged into houses based upon what the Founders thought were the best attributes for their students to have. The sorting hat itself made that clear year after year in its songs. Only their descendants were never found, never lauded, and never given the same kind of fame that Harry himself enjoyed. In fact, other than the Headmaster's comment, he didn't know of one family that could claim to be descended from their lines. So anyone who could be identified as one of the descendants of the Four Founders should, by all definitions, be protected and wanted in the Magical World. It was practically like having four royal families that went missing. Any clues as to one's whereabouts should have been both protected and cultured, not martyred.

These were questions and concerns that Harry could not find any answers to. Only by confronting Dumbledore could those answers be determined, so it was better to focus on the task at hand. Tomorrow, the last Sunday before retaking his O.W.L. exams, he was due to meet with his paternal grandparents, and his father and godfather. Up until this last Monday, Harry had not settled whether or not he'd ever meet his grandparents, or if he would focus on his parents and finding any clues that might lead him to the Children of Time. Well, this decision was taken out of his hands now, and they had an appointment to meet with them tomorrow. Only they would be discussing his assumed last name: Penwell. What was so wrong with the name to cause the reaction it did? Why was Charles Potter so adamant that they meet with him? They had even received a postal owl to their newly set up post office address a couple of days ago reminding them of the appointment, so it was obvious the Potter Patriarch really wanted this meeting. Luna could only say it was important, and that only by associating themselves with the Potters

could they survive. Why or how was fuzzy to the seeress, but neither he nor Hermione was going to press her further.

“A knut for your thoughts?” a female voice asked from beside him. Apparently Harry had been so lost in thought that he missed when Hermione had called to him. He even missed when she got up and went around to stand next to him. Now her hand was on his shoulder, and she had leaned over to speak into his ear. An involuntary shiver went through his body as her hot breath caressed his ear lobe, which continued down his spine.

“Minx,” he said quietly before turning his head to kiss Hermione on the cheek. Gifting her with a soft smile he replied, “I was just thinking about everything that’s happened, and trying to find a pattern to all of this mystery. So far nothing. Same thing applies for the name on my end. Do either of you have anything?”

Both young women shook their heads even as Hermione giggled and leaned back on the table. “Serves you right for losing yourself so deep in thought, Halstead. Unfortunately, there’s nothing here on the name Penwell save for some nobility papers from the Muggle Courts. Apparently before Runnymede the Penwells were some kind of Baron under the Crown. Then shortly after the Magna Carta was signed they disappeared, one and all. The only other thing of interest is that the first mention of the Penwells was during the time of the Four Founders. They were one of the supporting families for Hogwarts, along with seven others. Most of those names are lost even here.”

“Funny thing though,” Luna interjected as she put down a book in front of him. “The Department of Mystery’s library is supposed to be the most comprehensive in Britain. Every book, every newspaper, everything ever printed for more than three people can be found here. But for some reason, there’s gaping holes in the records. I’ve already alerted the Department’s Librarian, but there’s entire events that aren’t covered here that should be. The schism of the Four Founders for one. The primary and secondary family lines from each of them for another. In fact, the only discernable pattern I can see, in any way, is that anything having to do with the identities of the Four Founders’

families is gone. But that's not all. Some other events that have been known to be recorded are missing as well."

"How is that possible? The Unspeakable oaths forbid such a thing, and they're the only ones that can get down here." Hermione gasped, apparently shocked. Harry was beginning to wonder not so much about how the gaps occurred in the library themselves, but what they were hiding.

In fact, he voiced just that concern, "I'm more interested in what was being hidden. I mean, we have a very rough idea of some of what was missing, but not the other things. What was with that information that was so important? What is somebody trying to hide? I agree with both of you, it's obvious someone's trying to hide something. But that just makes me want to find out what that is even more."

"Find out what even more mate?" Ron's voice echoed as the others came in the door carrying large piles of books. Quickly Harry brought them up to date with what they found in the library, which produced a rather odd reaction out his best friend. Instead of either not caring, or looking aghast like Hermione, Ron paled slightly while his eyes took on a slightly disappointed look. "Bloody hell," he commented to the chorus of Hermione and Ginny both trying to correct his language. "That's not good Halstead, not good at all."

Harry watched Ron sit down with even a greater amount of concern. Ron's face turned very serious, the kind of serious Ron only showed in battle or about quidditch during the years. Ron's eyes flicked toward Ginny, then to Neville, then back to the trio. Finally Harry could stand no more and sat down opposite Ron and stared his best friend in the eyes. "Ryan, I can tell you know more than you're letting on. I'm sure Finnegan could if he were here, and he's not always the most observant person around. You've been acting strange lately, and it's not all about the Brains. You're even responding to them differently than I'd thought you would. I saw you offer them a grim salute the other day. What do you know?"

Ron took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Halstead, I had wanted to avoid telling you this for a while now, simply because I don't know

how you will react. Ginny tells me my fears are groundless, but . . . It's bloody scary mate. I even made Gwyneth promise not to tell anyone more than a few random facts, including her would-be boyfriend." Ron turned toward Neville for a moment, who was as red as Ginny (who was a bright Weasley red), and offered the young Scion an apologetic look. "Nathan, I'm sorry for asking your girlfriend to keep secrets from you, but it was a family thing, and we both had to have time to process it all." Neville pulled Ginny in to him and whispered in her ear. Harry noted that Ron looked rather quickly away, which told him that while the older Weasley was okay with the relationship, he still had problems witnessing PDA's.

After a brief conversation between Neville and Ginny, the former looked up and accepted Ron's apology so the older brother could continue. Ron then asked Hermione to secure the area, and after that was done he began to speak, "You all know I've been different lately. More focused, more attentive, and more into studying right? Well, part of that was because of the reason I told you before, the brains. But the other part is due to some news I had gotten just a couple of minutes before we were whisked away to the DOM. You see, my father handed me a box that contained some important details of family history. These were things that I never even suspected could be possible, and literally turned a great many things I have ever thought or felt upside down and inside out." Taking another deep breath, he turned toward Harry and shook his head. "You're right, I do know a bit more about what was taken, or at least a part of it. If you will bear with me, I'll tell you a story. And then . . . I have an apology to make mate."

Harry considered this for a moment. He was never really dumb, but he had to play the part growing up with the Dursleys so it became habit. That habit became ingrained, so it was hard to break when it came to scholastics. But anything else, and in his own way he was as sharp as Luna or Hermione. Harry took a brief moment fitting everything together, and quickly drew up a conclusion of possibilities, some good and some not so good. Finally he gave a brief nod to Ron and said, "Okay Ryan. I think I may have an idea, but I'm willing to listen." After a couple of brief comments, Harry finally took a piece of parchment and a quill and wrote down his guess. Giving it to Hermione, he sat back to let Ron tell his story.

Ron cleared his throat and stood up to lean on the back of his chair. Harry could tell by the way the young man was leaning in he was desperate for everyone to understand what he was saying. "Everyone knows the public story of Godric Gryphendor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, and Salazar Slytherin. I know I've heard it repeated over and over again, and have told it myself to several people. What people don't know is that the supposed ending of the story is not entirely accurate. You see, there was a split amongst the Four Founders. Salazar did leave the rest, including his wife whose name was lost in history. He took his sons with him though, Morvolo and Bartholomew. Why they left was not just the pure blood thing, but that was the last straw. You see, I have a diary from Salazar that covered from just before the split until just after the reunion. Yeah, I said reunion. You see, Salazar came back to the School and his friends."

Harry could begin to understand why Ron would feel shocked and lost, just from this information. This was something that no one ever knew or could guess. He could tell just from everyone else's faces that everyone else felt the same way. He felt the girls' astonishment at this news, as well as curiosity. The only person who wasn't completely aghast at this knowledge was Ginny, who was silently sending her brother looks of encouragement.

"Well," Ron began again after everyone had a moment to assimilate what they had heard so far, "When Salazar came back, it was to a warm welcome by his friends. You see, something became apparent that made Salazar's actions not quite his fault. Salazar doesn't ever really say what that was in his diary exactly, save that it involved some rather powerful controlling spells and potions used on him. But as much as his friends welcomed him back, his family was a different story. The sons were split down the middle. Morvolo was happy being Dark, and wanted nothing to do with the other Founders or their families. When Salazar made it clear that his family would be going back, Morvolo refused and left the house. Bartholomew on the other hand was not so happy being around Dark folks, and missed his friends. So the younger son, Bartholomew, took this news with great happiness and went with his father."

Ron took another deep breath and looked up to the ceiling as if collecting himself before continuing. "This unfortunately caused a rift in the family. The rift grew quickly until the brothers were nearly ready to kill each other. Salazar was willing to just wash his hands of the situation and let Bartholomew, who was thought to be the better duelist, fight Morvolo. The other three founders were begging Salazar to intervene though, and after some time finally convinced him to act. Unfortunately, it was too late. Morvolo decided to do a pre-emptive strike and invaded his brother's house one night, severely injuring Bartholomew's pregnant wife and oldest son, and killing the youngest two. Bartholomew had arrived home a scant minute before Morvolo leveled a dark curse at Bartholomew's wife. Upon seeing his wife in danger, Bartholomew cast the Expelliarmus spell at Morvolo. This started a duel that lasted for a day and half, and would have lasted longer had not Salazar stepped in to take a hand. But the damage was done to Salazar's family, and the boys were out for blood."

"Salazar agreed with the younger son personally, and wanted nothing more than to cast the elder son out. Unfortunately the Family Laws forbid him to do so, something was grating on the nerves apparently. Well, as the Family Laws stated that the eldest son gets the majority of the Estate, and so Salazar had no choice but to follow that. But he could make sure that the Elder son would not like what he reaped. So with this in mind, he gave Morvolo most of the estates and money, as well as just barely over half of the possessions of the family. There was however one condition: as the brothers had declared blood feud on each other, both were to change their names. They would then turn the blood feud into a line war to last until only one family remained. Salazar hated to do it that way, but he knew that the Dark Brother would have done much worse. In an attempt to minimize the number of innocents hurt, Salazar made it clear that the name of Lord Slytherin would only go to whichever family won the Line War. I imagine that Morvolo was less than pleased."

With this Ron reached into his robes and pulled out a shrunken book. A quick spell later had the book at full size and on the table. "This is Bartholomew's diary. He details the war between him and his brother from its beginnings all the way up until his death. It also tells what the last names for both the primary and secondary lines. The primary line was Morvolo Gaunt's. Why the Dark line took that name, I don't know."

But I do know the reason for Bartholomew's choice of last name: Weasley. He wanted it based off of his father's name, and at the same time would be something symbolic of his new position. And finally he wanted the name to be a tribute to the man that came up with the best chance for the Light side of the family to win. The lines are patriarchal, like most families, but reversed in age. The youngest son inherits the Head of the Weasley clan. And with that award comes the responsibility to end the Gaunt line."

To say everyone, save Ginny, was in shock was floored would have been a major understatement. No one could have seen this coming. In fact, Harry had a hard time having just about any rational thought save for one, and that was a broken record with no off switch. 'Ron is a descendent of Slytherin.' Somehow he could not get a firm grasp on that concept. Even with the talk about the Weasleys being the light side of the Slytherin family, it was still a lot to take in. His eyes shifted over toward Luna, who had lost her dreamy look in favor of one that suggested she would have fallen over if a feather had touched her. Hermione was sharing the exact same look, and it became apparent that the trio was of one thought: how is this even possible? It took a few long minutes before a voice started niggling the back of Harry's consciousness. Just as he heard that inside voice a female voice squeaked out, "But the last of the Gaunt line is Riddle . . . How on earth are you supposed to do that?"

Ron smiled at Hermione and actually chuckled. "I was hoping you'd tell me, since Harry's the only one who can kill him." The giggling almost became hysterical for a very brief moment before he closed his eyes and calmed down. "I know what's running through your heads. Yeah, this makes me the heir to Slytherin, after Riddle. Or even before now/then as he no longer has a connection to his mother by blood. As much as this was a shock to you, just imagine what it was like to me."

Harry just sat there in thought for a few moments in silent contemplation. He had known Ron for five years, and never once did he think that Ron had any real Slytherin traits. If there was anyone who was more of an anti-Slytherin than Ron, Harry didn't know of them. Ron didn't have any of the traits that he had come to associate with the family. Ron's potions ability was the closest, and even there

his friend was nothing to write home about. Ron wasn't a parseltongue that he knew of, and while Ron was one of the best strategists he knew of, the man simply did not have the outlook most people who came from that house at Hogwarts had. No, he considered Ron his brother, and he could sometimes be just like Draco in his beliefs and air of superiority, but he would never have thought his friend as part of the Slytherin family, much less his heir.

That however changed within the next few seconds when he heard Ron speak next, "There wasss a block on the family powersss that wasss removed by a deviccce in the boxss my father gave me. Now Harry and I have sssomething elssse in common." As Harry had been practicing his own parseltongue powers, he now knew it when he heard it. His head snapped up even as his hand went for his wand. He was stopped from drawing it however when he said, "I was the one to insist we fly the car to Hogwarts. You wanted to try and find another way." Harry nodded once, still surprised, and relayed what he had said to everyone else. He could still feel the surprise from Hermione and Luna, though Luna's was quickly settling down.

Finally Harry calmed down enough to reach a decision. He stood up and walked over to his friend and held out his hand. "I'm with you mate. It will take more than this bit of news to make me turn my back to you. Besides, the Sorting Hat wanted to put me in Slytherin originally. What stopped him was my insistence that I go to Gryphendor to be with my first and best mate." He smiled at the obvious relief on his friend's face, and once Ron took his hand he pulled his friend up for a manly backslapping hug. Ron actually stiffened for a moment then chuckled softly and returned the hug.

His friend's apprehensive mood had been broken, and when they separated Ron smiled as he clasped Harry's shoulder. "Lilith and Haleigh have been good for you. You were never this demonstrative before." Ron actually laughed at Harry's surprised face before saying, "Oh please, it's bloody obvious to everyone else that you three are very close, and probably dating. And knowing you as I do, you wouldn't be doing that behind their backs. And the only thing I can say is its about time."

Harry laughed as the two women blushed, with Hermione the closest one swatting the now blond-headed boy on the leg. With this the tension seemed to break and the group dissolved into laughter. Everyone returned to their seats to get caught up on what was going on. It had occurred to Harry that the three of them hadn't told the rest about the encounter with the Potters, so he decided to let them know what they were researching and why. Hedwig and Fawkes both appeared during this story, each settling upon the back of their companion's chairs. Harry was always comforted by Hedwig's presence, and now was no exception. Finally when the story was done the questions began.

The discussion between the six of them took a couple of hours, but in the end they all reached the same conclusion that Harry, Luna, and Hermione had, they would have to wait and see. There was a promise extracted out of the threesome that if they could not convince the Potters to allow the other three to come along, they would at least come back and explain to the others what they found out. Harry was nervous, and a little upset. To him it seemed like he never could catch a break.

Potter Manor
Wales
July 27, 1975
Harry's POV

After the discussion in the DOM library, it had been decided amongst the six of them it was better for them all to go to Potter Manor the next day. So Harry had to send off a request to the Potters, who after reading his letter had sent him a positive reply. Thus, at 10 the next morning all six of them showed at Gringotts, asking to speak to Slicktooth. At first Harry had been rather nervous about what kind of verification would be used for their identities, but the presence of the phoenixes as well as a scan of their magic provided the proof that they were the people who had been invited. A portkey trip later, and they were here, in front of a rather impressive set of gates that led up to the Manor. They were at least 15 foot high and made of a silver-colored metal Harry could not quite identify. The walls around the property extended on for as far as he could see, and they were

topped with spikes jutting at different angles outward, all made of the same metal as the Gates. The gates were intricately fashioned, with symbols of various Light-sided creatures that almost seemed to cavort around a large, centered coat of arms. The arms, which Harry hadn't ever seen before, were beautiful to him. The crest itself displayed three gryphons, two up top and one on bottom, all standing, with a wide bar horizontally between the two above and one below consisting of what looked to be a bunch of tracks all headed upward. Atop the crest was a knight's helm which seemed to be wearing a ducal or baronial coronet with wild plumes strewn around the top and sides. Underneath was a large scroll which bore a Latin phrase, "Virtus Sub Incendia." While Harry didn't know much about heraldry, he did know enough Latin to translate the motto. "Courage under fire," he said in an awe inspired voice. After thinking about it for a moment he smiled. "Very fitting, don't you think?"

While everyone agreed with Harry's statement Hermione went up and started to touch the crest. But before she could actually touch it Luna took a hold of the reaching hand and silently warned her of the enchantments most gates held. Hermione blushed at this, just in time for a house elf to appear. "Greetings sirs, I is Tobby, and you is Lord Potter sir's guests. Please, follow me." The gates opened inward, causing the house elf to back up in a sweeping bowing motion.

Harry stood straight and started forward with a nod to the house elf, "Thank you Tobby. You and your family have done an excellent job here." The house elf bowed his head and continued to lead the group up to the front doors, which opened as the elf stepped on the first step. About 10 feet behind the doors stood the Potter Family as he had seen them in Diagon Alley, only slightly better dressed. Lord Potter was an older gentleman with dark but greying hair. His face was a lot like Harry's when he was in his usual form, and very much like James's. He had brown eyes however, and the face was set with fine and soft wrinkles. He wore a casual smile stiffened only by protocol as was the rest of his tall, thin frame.

Grace was a good half foot shorter than her husband with wavy chestnut brown hair. It showed a few grey hairs, but not as much as Charles had. Her eyes were a bright blue that set within her more triangular face quite well. She wore an easy smile that showed on the

rest of her body. Warmth shined in her eyes as she looked upon her guests. Not for the first time did Harry want to just jump in her arms and weep for his life. It nearly broke his heart to know they would never meet in his own time. Her dress reminded him a lot of Hermione's yule ball dress, which oddly enough seemed to make to him feel more at home. James and Sirius were behind the adults, looking like younger versions of what they knew by photographs in the first case, and personal experience in the second. Harry was still uneasy around his father and his godfather, but he carefully squelched that feeling so he could focus on the matter at hand.

"Lord Potter," Harry began formally, "Thank you for inviting us to your manor. Please accept this bottle of wine as gratitude for serving as our host this day." He had spent many hours practicing his presentation during the week, as he knew he had a cover story to uphold.

The look on Charles's face showed he managed to succeed in at least that much, "Thank you Lord Penwell, if you would allow Toby to take the package off your hands, we can retire to the sitting room where we can get to know each other better?" The man stepped forward and held his hand out to Harry, an offering to shake hands with the younger person as if they were equals.

This confused Harry slightly, but he knew that not to accept the hand would be an insult. Several pages of research flipped through his mind at this time. He and Hermione had spent a fairly large amount of time going over the magical society's traditions and "manner and decorum," as well as other bits of information that the pure blooded members of his group could point out as necessary for them to know. Not for the first time Harry was glad he accepted Neville's deal for lessons, for at least he knew how to act and where to look for the vague "but everyone knows that" information that all pure bloods, even their friends, took for granted that the two muggle-related people would simply have to know. The Beedle and the Bard was interesting reading for example, and had explained some of the sayings he had heard in the past. After shaking his hand, he bowed toward his hosts and responded, "It would be my pleasure sir. You have met both Haleigh Joyce Galway and Lilith Leedham of course," he stepped forward and to the right to allow the women their entrance

before continuing, "May I represent our friends, brothers and sister in arms, and only other family we have left to us, Ryan Bartholomew and Gwyneth Melynda Whitcomb, the sole survivors of the Whitcomb family."

Ron and Ginny came forward and bowed toward Lord Potter, the older brother holding out his hand for the Lord to shake, as befitted his station. After the Potter head shook Ron's hand, Ginny stepped forward and offered her hand for the traditional kiss, which she received chastely on the back of her hand. The brother and sister duo then turned toward the Lady of the House, and reversed the greetings, Ron kissing her hand while Ginny lightly shook the Ladies. The boys received nods before the duo moved past for the last person. "And this is Nathan Lambeth, sole remaining member of the Lambeth line." Harry was pleased when Neville's manners were impeccable. But then, with Augusta Longbottom as his teacher they really couldn't be anything but. Finally the trio moved forward and exchanged formal greetings with the Potter family, then went into the indicated sitting room.

Once both families arrived in the sitting room, and everyone was seated, the elves brought some pre-dinner refreshments, mainly of the juice and butterbeer varieties. Harry himself chose the butterbeer after some deliberation, with Hermione and Luna both choosing juices. They would be his anchors while he would use the admittedly non-alcoholic butterbeer to warm his heart with courage. He had no idea what to say or how to start talking to this family, but he knew he couldn't just blather out their real history. Avoiding it, and still being able to explain some of Harry's reactions were going to make tonight very difficult to him. He could feel the two loves of his life supporting him through the growing link, and it felt comfortable.

After some small chat Grace finally smiled and asked what would normally be a fairly innocuous question, "So, how did you all meet?"

The six teens looked at each other for a few moments as if seeming to decide who should go first. Finally Harry took the matter in hand and answered, "Well, we're actually all from different parts of Britain, and we met on our way to our tutor's manor. You see, for simplicity's

sake we were meeting at Diagon Alley and then portkeying to a town just about 30 kilometers Northwest of Brecon. From there we were picked up by carriages and rode to the outskirts of Ravenshire.” He noticed with a glance that all the hosts seemed to blink at that, as if shocked. “I see you’ve heard of the place,” he commented with a touch of sad irony.

“Is . . . is it true?” Sirius asked, only to be elbowed by James, who looked at his friend as if he had asked the worst question ever.

‘So there’s some evidence of restraint there after all,’ Harry thought to himself as he witnessed that. So far Harry had to say he could see a little of what Snape had said about his father, but he could also see a decent man in there as well. This gave Harry some hope that Snape had been wrong. That, and Hermione’s insistence that Snape was far from impartial. “That it’s been destroyed? Yeah, it’s true.” Truth be told his team had gone to the site a couple of days after they arrived in this time and spent the day familiarizing themselves with the area. It also helped cement what the first war was really like. There wasn’t a dry eye amongst his team by the end of that day. “I’d really rather not talk about what I saw there for the most part though. I . . .” Memories of Sirius falling through the veil lingered on the edges of his consciousness when he remembered this part of his cover story. Amelia had to keep the cover story as close to the real thing as possible so that the group to pull off the cover story. As such, the reactions of Hermione and Luna were natural when they both took a hand and squeezed it. Harry smiled at them sadly and continued, “I lost my godfather in that battle. He was one of the few adults that genuinely cared, you know. I wish I could have had longer with him.”

From the look on the adults’ faces, this last bit seemed to floor them. They both wore the sympathetically shocked faces of someone caught unawares. Interestingly enough it was Ginny who spoke up first while Harry’s ladies comforted him, “Please don’t worry about Hal, he’ll be okay. It’s just that the death is very fresh. And while it’s not the first he’s seen, it was unfortunately one of the closest he’s ever witnessed. Most of the time he’s pretty much okay, at least in front of just about anyone else other than Haleigh or Lilith.” This explanation earned a knowing nod from both adults, and a speculative nod from

the younger pair of hosts. Harry was grateful for Ginny's intervention, for he could not handle them trying to reach out to him in that manner at this moment. So instead he took a few minutes to compose himself before he continued.

"Ryan was the first person I met, he was scheduled to take the same portkey I was. He asked me about my scar, and from that point on we were friends. Haleigh and Nathan were next, as we met them in the waiting room for the carriages. They were both looking for a toad as I recall," he said while glancing between them with a smile. "We were quickly settled in with our tutors, where we began to study. Haleigh was the first to become friends with Ryan and me, and that was only after we happened upon a rather ugly troll that we wound up having to rescue Haleigh from."

"Wicked," James said. He sounded so much like Ron that none of the group could help it, they all fairly exploded with laughter. Ron was laughing the loudest, and then proceeded to give the young Marauder a few lessons on how to say the word correctly. The reason for their laughter became readily apparent to their hosts as Ron talked.

"Sorry, just the way he said it was almost like Ryan," Harry explained just to be sure before continuing with his story. "Well, after the troll incident she fit in with us, and we became a Trio. Nathan was a shy bit of a boy," he said, only to be rasberried by Neville in retaliation, "So he was more of a satellite friend. Gwyneth I met over the following summer when I was rescued from my relations and brought to Ryan's house. Though at first she had a bit of problem with both talking and butter dishes." At this point Harry had to duck a glare from Ginny and a promise of retribution from Ginny. "Eyes like a soft brown bear, Gwyneth." Enjoying Ginny's blush as that statement brought back the real reference, he continued, "Anyway, after that summer Gwyneth joined our session, and Lilith started to show up as well. The other three were pretty much loners and hung round the few other students being taught by our tutors."

"These sessions sound a lot like a school, I don't get why you don't call it that, or why you just didn't go to Hogwarts," Charles commented. Harry shrugged for a moment and then said, "I don't

know why on the others, but for me my parents left in their will that I should go to these tutors. Merlin knows I wouldn't have been able to go otherwise. My aunt and uncle are muggles, and hate magic." The fact that the others nodded solemnly and Harry's two loves both winced did not go unnoticed by anyone in the room, though the Potters pretty much appeared not to have. "They would never have let me go to Hogwarts, my aunt and uncle I mean. Only the will forced them to let me go to training, and magic itself was a taboo subject in my house after I started. They had tried their best to get me to hate the magical world by commenting it was a wizard's fault they were the ones to, quote "get saddled with me," end quote." Harry tried to remain unconcerned and unemotional while describing his relatives, and thought for the most part he succeeded.

"Our parents," Ron said, suggesting both Ginny and himself, "Live a few kilometers away from Ottery St. Catchpole. They're the quiet types though, so I don't think the other magical families there even knew where ours lived. Dad was a bit of a muggle fr . . . enthusiast, and mom was a house mom, though she's great with potions." Ginny gave her brother a hard look, almost unable to believe the slip he almost made there. She smiled though and shook her head to add, "Dad is . . . Dad. He was a good man though."

Luna took her turn in her typical fashion. "My Dad was a journalist. He did articles mainly on rare and endangered creatures. It's kind of a family thing really. Mom died when I was younger due to a charm-slash-potions accident. So it had been just me and my dad until recently. I swear I'll find the crumple-horned snorkack someday though."

Harry and Hermione both jumped at the last comment, but then quickly remembered with Luna's silent help that they were rumored to exist even before she was born, and The Quibbler wasn't out yet, so it was not a giveaway. The Quibbler had picked up an already existing hunt and put it forth into the masses, so there was no really big suspicious activity there. Finally Hermione sighed, shook her head and said, "My Dad was a healer that worked for St. Mungos." Hermione's alternate persona was perhaps the most researched of all of them, because she had to pass as a half-blood even though she

was first-generation. "My Mom was a muggle dentist, retired from practice so she could spend time raising me and learning about her husband's world."

Charles had been following them all and picked up on one important aspect of all of this, "You used past tense for your parents. What happened? Not all of them could have been in Ravenshire, not with that diverse of a parentage."

Neville nodded to that and answered, "Well, my parents were aurors, and were present when the Death Eaters attacked. As you know, there weren't any survivors, save us six, since the messenger died recently. It was a big coincidence though, since our parents had come to the tutoring house for interviews with our teachers. Or I would have called it coincidence, if things had not happened the way they had. The only guardians not present at the attack was Halstead's, and his were killed just before the attack." Neville looked over toward Harry for a moment, who gave him a sad smile and nod.

"My Aunt, Uncle, and cousin were all killed by the same group that hit Ravenshire just the night before. I'm sure you heard of the gas main explosion in Surry? That was them." Since it was fairly evident from Charles's face, not to mention his wife's that more of an explanation was needed, Harry decided to open up a bit more of the cover story, instantly picking a Death Eater to out, "The Lestranges have had it in for me for a while. Almost as bad as they wanted Nathan. They had, with some of their other comrades, been waging a series of attacks against me since I returned to the Magical World. You see, my parents were killed when I was eighteen months old, and I was placed with my aunt and uncle to hide me away and keep me safe. When I came back to the Magical World, they started their campaign anew. Since I was 11, I had faced at least one life or death situation at least once a year, often more often than that. So when they saw they had a chance to wipe out not only my Godfather, but my entire support structure, and that was a worst case scenario for them, they took it. They had found out where I was living a year ago and took out my relatives along the way. It was a miracle that we survived, though Haleigh nearly didn't, and Ryan was attacked by some beast on the way out. If it wasn't for Nathan's parents calling for back up, we never would have made it."

Harry raised his head, which he had lowered when he started his part of the explanation, and saw the response in the eyes of the Potters. Charles looked angry, very much so. Harry could see the pain in the older man's eyes, but he could see that it also fueled his anger. If he had to hazard a guess as to Lord Potter's state of mind right now, he would say Righteous Outrage. Harry was glad he was not a Death Eater, or especially not a Lestranger. Grace looked stricken, almost as bad as he would have assumed Molly would be in her place. The boys looked embarrassed and at the same time concerned for the sextet. Grace however tried to find a silver lining, "Well, the protection did work for a little bit, right? At least you had what, sixteen years?"

"Yeah, at the price of happiness and well being. It protected him from them, but not from his relatives," Hermione spat. Harry finally had to sit down not that long ago and give both of his loves an overview of his life at Privet drive. While Hermione was rather loudly alternating between hysterics and almost overwhelming hostile anger toward his relatives, Luna scared him more. She simply smiled, kissed him on the mouth passionately, and renewed her decision to kill the Dursleys. The way she said it was so matter of fact that he became scared for his relatives for the first and only time in his history. Secretly he hoped never to piss off Luna to anywhere approaching that extent. She was dangerous when crossed. Even now, she got her dreamy look on her face, but you could just see the tortures she had in mind for his relatives. It had made him wonder if his relatives actually got away from their future encounter unscathed, or in anything short of a coma.

Grace had her face pointed down to her lap as she had reviewed the reactions of the six children. They all looked ready to maim or kill. "I'm sorry, I didn't understand," she said in a small voice. Luckily Charles looked like he was reeling from all that he had heard so far to be upset with Hermione.

"No, I'm sorry Mrs. Potter," Hermione returned with a sigh. "I shouldn't have snapped like that. The only thing those useless lumps of humanity ever did for Halstead was to give him some idea of the Magical World so that he could tell them no and convince them of it."

Harry was watching the Potters during this. The man seemed to sympathize with their predicament, though he looked either confused or disbelieving at some points, especially that last point, given both the statement and Hermione's almost bitter attitude at the comment. Harry was about to try to get them off the topic though when James derailed his attempt with an attempt of his own that was guaranteed to fail. "So where are you all living now? I mean, all of you are now Orphans, right?"

Harry inwardly sighed, but did not show it outwardly as he responded. "For now, we have all been put up at the Ministry, since we've been apprenticed by the DMLE. That apprenticeship is contingent of us performing well on our O.W.L.'s. It will last until we complete our N.E.W.T.s. In the meantime we are training in the summers at the Ministry and have been accepted into Hogwarts for our . . . sixth and seventh years, isn't it?" Harry was hoping that would end the investigation into their lives, but that wasn't to be quite yet.

"And thus putting you right out where people could get at you," Charles muttered in what he thought was a quiet voice, though Harry had heard him. With that the hope plummeted as the older man continued aloud, "You said for now. I take it you have to find something? Do you have any other relatives you can go to? Any of you?"

All six people shook their heads while Harry was watching them intently. He noted Charles looking over at Grace, who looked back with a raised eyebrow. It seemed as they had the kind of silent conversation that Harry, Hermione, and Luna were all quickly becoming known to have on a regular basis. "We'll find something. I'm sure something will present itself before we have to move," he added helpfully.

"I'm sure it will," was the answer Charles gave back enigmatically before shrugging. "You'd be surprised by what can change."

Just then Bobby popped into the room and announced that Dinner was served. With this Grace stood up and smiled at the guests,

“Okay, rule at the dinner table is polite conversation only. No discussing business or unpleasant topics at the dinner table. I would suggest quidditch or something similar.” By this time everyone was so emotionally drained that they readily agreed.

The next hour or so was spent at a rather large and splendid feast with at least three removes, not counting pudding. As proposed, the topics for dinner were light, and included quidditch for those so inclined, or fashion and standard gossip for those not so quidditch inclined. Hermione of course had the worst trouble with this conversation, but soon was engaged by, of all people, Sirius Black, who talked to her about some of the less common charms they knew. It wasn't really shop talk, since it dealt more with the more embarrassing ones than actual lethal ones, and more theory than anything else, but it kept the two of them occupied. When the desert finally came, the overall mood of both the guests and the hosts had improved, and laughter could be heard throughout the room. Finally the elves were thanked, and the party once again moved to the dining room. Only just as the party was moving, Grace caught Luna's attention for a quick talk.

A few minutes later both James and Sirius excused themselves for the night, claiming to have some plans to make for the upcoming school year. James however looked at Harry and said, “I hope you have a good time at Hogwarts. You'll be right above me in year, you know. Do you think you'll be sorted into Gryffindor?”

Harry couldn't help but to chuckle at this and shrug. “I'll be sorted where I'm sorted, though I'm likely to be sorted before the year begins, as Ms. Bones had mentioned that they would want to do it early so as to keep the focus on the first years.” With a wish of luck, James ran off, followed closely by Sirius, who looked very curious about their conversation before being chased out. The chuckling quickly died however when the adults immediately began to cast spells around the room on all the doors and windows. Harry recognized some of them as silencing charms of course, and he had expected those. But several other charms were added that not only prevented eavesdropping, but entrances and exits from and to the room. Harry slowly (and he had hoped surreptitiously), and had noticed the stances of the others changing at the same time. When

the adults were done, Charles held his wand by his side while his wife laid hers on the coffee table near her, though she did not lean back and kept her hand near it.

“We don’t mean you any harm,” the Potter Patriarch announced. “I can tell you’ve been trained rigorously by your stances. One reason we sealed the room is that the boys don’t know what we are about to discuss yet. James has another two years before he finds out. We can’t afford to have them eavesdrop.” Charles moved his wand into a nonthreatening position before looking directly at Harry. The older man’s eyes were both probing, and at the same time, honest, and that more than anything else made Harry want to believe the older man.

At the same time Harry could not afford the probing part of this, especially if it went the way he thought it would go. So as a compromise Harry lowered his wand only slightly while matching gaze for gaze. “Okay, you’re telling the truth about not meaning us any harm, as far as I can tell, but if that’s the case why haven’t you put yours away yet?” He felt dumb for asking this, as he already knew of a couple of different reasons he wouldn’t do so in the older man’s place, not the least of which was the presence of the six people with varying ready stances. No, Harry wouldn’t lower his at all, at least not until the strangers lowered theirs.

In fact, Grace apparently decided to answer this with a little well-deserved sarcasm, “Oh yes, lower our wands to be hexed by a bunch of paranoid teenagers who admittedly have seen more war than I ever want to. That wouldn’t be very smart of us, now would it?”

Luna’s laughter rang out at this, thus helping to diffuse the situation even further. “No, it wouldn’t be very smart at all,” she agreed. ‘Remember I told you we needed to trust them, Harry.’ Luna’s voice reminded him in his head. For a brief moment Harry considered thinking bitterly of the last person he trusted, but then remembered that it was Luna, not Dumbledore. This seemed to stop his brain process for a moment as he reviewed the last couple of months on his own time line. Time and time again he could see where if he had trusted his closest friends just a bit more, he would have had an easier time of things. Even though he had thought he was trusting his

friends, there were times when his anger overrode that trust. And during those times people got hurt, and in one case killed. And then he remembered that his friends, especially Luna and Hermione, were probably the best gauges of people he knew. Even their blind spots supplanted each-other. Since this was the case, the two witches were probably the people he should trust the most, and from their reactions he should make judgements about others.

With that in mind he sent a mental thanks to Luna and regarded the two adults carefully, along with their actions. While he had to admit he knew too little about them personally, they were his grandparents from his father's side, not his mother's. And so far they showed both competence and perception. Also, they had suggested the first time they talked that the subject they were going to discuss was very much sensitive. And thus far, everything they had done to secure the room was both ways. Given the evidence, he had to admit that they had told at least a partial truth. In that, he could trust them at the moment. Besides, he had learned a couple of spells wandlessly and silently, thanks to the Unspeakable training. The first one was of course the summoning spell. He would not be without his wand for long. Slowly he reached over to put his wand down on the coffee table a short way away from Grace's.

This act of partial trust seemed to do the trick as Luna, Hermione, and Charles all set their wands down on the table at the same time. Once all wands were down, each person backed off from their wands, and tried to relax to varying degrees of success. Harry and Charles were ironically the most tense, while Luna was her normal seemingly slightly spacey self that was her shield and cover. He knew she was concerned, but she was also more trusting than anyone else. The group fell into a somewhat uncomfortable silence for a moment before Charles finally spoke up, "Okay, what we need to discuss is very sensitive, and frankly anyone can claim to be of some family or another, and few would be able to tell the difference. Even the knowledge of someone knowing this is enough to cause major problems. And to be quite blunt, the story you told me had both a lot of truth and a lot of lies in it."

Harry tried to keep a calm demeanor, though inside he was rather fuming over how they could be so transparent that a couple of

strangers could pick it up. But he was not going to let that show until Ron exclaimed, "But how . . ."

Thankfully Charles held up his hand and cut Ron off before he gave away the whole thing. "It's not something that just anyone could tell," he said while tapping his head, "The Potter line has more than its share of people with Mage Sight, each to varying degrees. I'm of a moderate level, more than enough to ferret out lies in a person's aura." Ron's mouth just flopped open as his head turned toward Harry in astonishment. Harry had to admit to himself he did not know this but he couldn't even say anything before Charles continued, "I have read enough to know that you are, at least vaguely, attached to the DMLE. I also know that the stories you told were mostly true, almost as if names and places were changed to protect the innocent. That further leads credence to your being part of the Ministry in some ways. At the same time I can recognize you know a lot more than you let on, and that you recognized the boys from somewhere before. Young Mr. Black more so than my son. That would normally be of a concern, given his family problems, but from Mr. Penwell's response to some of the stories you told, and the recognition, I can figure out you are not members of the Black Family, or at least the main branch. Also there's a half-truth when you introduce yourselves, which leads me to a problem of trusting you with this knowledge."

Harry took a deep breath and considered his options for a moment. He looked to each side of him to his girlfriends, who seemed to be deadlocked on what to do. Then he looked to Ron, who looked thoughtful in his own right. Ron in turn looked over to Neville and Ginny, who had been quiet so far and they simply shrugged their shoulders in a confused way. Ron then nodded and looked to Charles, "At least one of us needs that information sir. And to be honest, we pretty much tell each other almost everything. We definitely share all the important things that effect the group. If there is a danger to the name Penwell, then we need to know. I realize we can't force you to tell us, nor would I want to try. But if you can help, please do. We won't betray you."

Harry was shocked at Ron's statement momentarily before he remembered he shouldn't be. Finally he turned to Charles and nodded. "Some day I would like to sit with you and discuss family gifts,

but now isn't really the time. I will, if you wish, take a wizard's oath stating I will not intentionally harm, either directly or indirectly, you or any member of your family. I don't know of anything else that we can do, unless you have a suggestion?"

Charles had listened to the pleas of his guests and nodded once. He seemed to take a few moments to consider his options, then looked directly at Harry. "Speak for me once more," he commanded.

Harry was confused by the statement, but he knew somehow that this was going to make or break their efforts. And given that they couldn't find anything in the DOM library, this could be the only chance. "I don't know what you want me to say, but I wish to learn whatever information you have for me. If I'm going to be out and about, especially at Hogwarts," he explained with a slight venom in his voice at the mention of the school, "Then I need to know. Otherwise, I won't be ready when trouble comes to find me."

Harry was further confused by the look of understanding and recognition on Charles's face. The man seemed to blink once then settle down during the explanation before turning to his wife. He appeared to be weighing his options for a few moments before finally saying, "This goes under trade." All the teens of course recognized this phrase immediately. It had only been drilled into them from the start of their training. Luna seemed the most unsurprised as she nodded, Hermione only a step behind her. This was followed by Neville, Ron, then Ginny, with Ginny being shocked.

Harry was somewhere between Ron and Neville in shock, so it took him a few moments to regain actual speech, "This discussion falls under trade." Charles nodded once, his suspicions now confirmed. Harry then waited patiently for Charles to continue.

Though surprisingly enough it was Grace who first spoke, "We all know the rules, though I'm on the Research side, and technically so is Charles. We have a bit easier time when divulging our identities. Charles is really a mind healer. As you know, covert and active ops personnel can't go to a normal one, for it would be rather pointless. So the Department keeps a group of three mind healers on call when missions get too hairy and someone comes back with a few issues.

So he has access to files most people would not. Also he's the leader of the mind healing group, so he has access to the uncensored files of all operatives in all positions. That way he can help root out problems before they arise."

"In fact," Charles said with a smile, "That's how I sussed you out. And before you ask, I do know, based upon the stories you gave me, which team you are. There's only one team that has your specific background, so it's not hard to tell you're Team Gamma. I don't quite, however, have all your identities down yet. The three of you," he said, pointing to Harry and his bondmates, "I know if for no other reason than the phoenixes and the relationship. The other three I'm not quite sure of. But that is neither here nor there, really. What matters at this point is that now I know why you are lying, I'm prepared to believe you. Though there are some interesting omissions from the files, like your names. Are the names you presented to me real ones, or did you make up new names when you came back?"

Ginny, who no longer could remain silent, spoke up, "How complete are those files? I mean, they don't have our names you said, but how much history do they give?"

Harry, who had already viewed the files and put things together rather quickly, decided to answer both Ginny and Charles, "The names we use here are made up, but not by us. They're to hide our identities from some rather unscrupulous people that live in this time that also live in ours. Quite a few of them in fact. I've red those files, and while omitting names, dates, and ancestry, they're pretty accurate overall over what happened. Let me guess, Jason had asked you to talk to at least myself, if not Gwyneth, after our O.W.L.'s?"

Ginny blushed at this, then paled as she realized what could be contained in those files. Charles on the other hand looked rather serious but comforting and answered Ginny's concern first. "Miss Whitcomb, I was asked to talk to you about your experiences with the Horcrux. As much as it is dangerous for anyone in this time to know the future, you can rest assured that your secrets are safe with me. In fact after I finally clear you I'll be obliterated to avoid my using that knowledge. In the meantime I'll just have to resist temptation. But rest assured, from what I've read you were not at fault." Leaving Ginny to

blush and cry softly in Neville's arms, he then turns his attention toward Harry, "As for you, same thing applies, though we'll probably be in session for quite some time."

Harry gulped at this as he knew that during this time the older man would find out his true identity. He looked at Luna for a moment, then at Hermione. "Excuse us for a moment," Harry said suddenly as he got up and dragged the two witches with him. Harry erected a privacy sphere and the three had a brief but active discussion. The girls were divided as to whether or not to simply tell Charles or to request another mind healer to work with him. Finally Luna put it best when she said, "Harry, this is your family. There are things from your family that you need to know that you won't find out any other way. You know this. I don't foresee many forks off of this decision that change too many things. Most of them go the same way that things had before. In fact, the major branches don't occur until after we get back, save one. We live or die by this decision Harry. I think you know what we need to do."

Hermione just shrugged after Luna got done and said, "Arithmetically this is very dangerous, especially considering this is your grandfather. But I don't think you'll be able to avoid it. Harry, in this you need to go with your gut. I'm sorry, I wish I could be of more help." Harry could see the sadness in her face and pulled her into a hug, murmuring reassurances in her ear. Finally the privacy bubble came down, and the trio looked back to the others.

The other three members seemed to be very worried about what would happen next, but they appeared to trust Harry. He sighed and took Hermione's hand before he looked the mind healer in the eyes, "Sir, I have a confession to make. This absolutely cannot leave this room, and if your wife wishes to be obliviated after this, we can arrange something." The Potters looked between each other, then looked back at Harry in all seriousness before he continued. "Sir, as I mentioned, Penwell is not my real last name. My real last name . . ."

"Halstead," Ginny interrupted, "I'm sorry, but are you sure you want to do this?" She looked really nervous about this, but realized even that question was giving one too many clues as she watched Grace's reaction.

A dozen different emotions crossed Grace's face at once as she gasped, "Oh sweet Merlin . . . Please don't tell me?"

Giving Ginny the most reassuring nod he could, which wasn't so reassuring in this situation, he looked back to Charles again, "My real name, the one gave to me at birth, is Harry James Potter. I'd rather not have told you this, for it's taking an alarmingly huge risk, but I can agree that in the hands of anyone else in the DOM this information would be very dangerous. One could argue that this would be even more dangerous telling you, but I've been assured by someone I trust you'll be able to handle this."

At this Grace seemed to collapse, the stories she heard tonight, even if partially true, painted a grim picture of the future world. Charles's face merely shut down emotionally, going even beyond his professional mask. "I can understand why you would have to tell me, I would not have accepted a request for a different healer without a reason you could give me. Just two questions: How much of the story of your childhood home was true, and are you sure you don't want someone else?"

Harry sighed and started toward the older couple only to stop a few feet from them. For some reason he felt pretty vulnerable right now as he looked them both in the eyes. He wasn't sure how he was able to handle any of this. These were his grandparents, and they weren't exactly someone he could shrug off. Fears of rejection welled up inside of him threatening to boil over. It was only that iron will he had when he was fighting Voldemort that prevented him from running. "I . . . well . . . I'd . . . like to . . . uh . . . get to know my grandparents," he admitted truthfully. "We won't have . . . I know nothing about the Potters really. My childhood home story was . . . " he bowed his head and raised his hand to wipe his eyes from their moisture. The girls walked over and placed their hands on his shoulders as he found himself unable to speak.

"Sir," Hermione began as she hugged him from his left. Luna moved in and hugged him from his right, and both of them looked at the older man, "I don't quite know how to say this, or the fullest extent of his

past, but the stories of his childhood home are understated. By quite a bit, if my suspicions are true.”

That was all Harry’s grandmother could take as she left the couch and ran up to hug her grandson. Charles stepped forward and placed a hand on his shoulder and whispered, “It’s not your fault Harry.” The old man’s hand squeezed firmly, fairly shaking with control. “There’s not really much that can be done to prevent it, without changing the time stream and causing a paradox. But we’ll be here to give you as much help and support as you need. And don’t worry about the Potter family histories, I’ll teach them all to you.”

The others got up and got behind Harry, each laying a hand on their friend in support. Harry could only stand there and cry quietly for quite some time, though he never collapsed. Finally after what seemed like forever he looked up and smiled weakly at his Grandfather as he gave his grandmom a hug, “Thank you sir, I’d like that very much” he said quietly. “I do have a lot of questions, especially regarding certain artifacts. But its getting late, and we should be getting back to the Department sometime within the next hour or so. What can you tell me about the Penwells?”

Both older people looked rather concerned at the way Harry went straight to business again, but they appeared to understand that he had a point on the time thing. “Halstead, to put it simply, the Penwells were a family that was recorded as dead for over a century and a half. They were the primary line of one of the Four Founders. Rowena’s line to be exact. The circumstances for that line’s end were . . . suspicious. At least to the public. The truth is a bit more dangerous and macabre. Not only that, but it is rather dangerous as well.”

The group began to take their seats before the women gasped, and Ron looked a little pale. “What do you mean by dangerous sir?”

Charles sighed and shook his head, “Charles will do when we’re not garbed, or Grandfather or some variation thereof where these three are concerned.” Both Hermione and Luna could not help but feel and look relieved at Lord Potter’s acceptance of them both, and they showed such by squeezing Harry’s hand a bit tighter for a brief time. “What I say now is not known by anyone not connected somehow to

the family lines of the Four Founders. You see, none of the Founders died peacefully. No one really knows why, but it is passed down amongst the lines that they needed to hide their status, for something or someone was hunting them down. As I said, the reasons were lost, but the point was brought home when the Penwell line was ended. Most people couldn't detect the Dark Magic used to destroy the line, but it was indeed killed, down to the newest born baby, in a matter of twenty-four hours."

Harry looked at his grandfather for a moment and said, "We're from Gryffindor's line, aren't we?" Harry looked like he was certain, but needed confirmation of this.

Charles stared hard into Harry, causing the younger man to wince slightly thinking he said something wrong. "I would dearly love to know how you found out about that, but yes. The Potter line is the main line of Godric Gryffindor. Some of our records were destroyed as the family had to escape mobs sent against us, based upon merest suspicion. We've denied it at every turn, even denying access to the vaults in Gringotts that are ours by right. We lost track of the cadet line, but certain family artefacts we have say they still exist. We have to hide from everyone though, for no one knows who is hunting the lines. All that is known is that to announce our lineage is death. That's why I called you brave to declare you a Penwell, for that line died for that very reason. I'd recommend changing it, but unfortunately there's too much of a paper trail with that name already."

Harry sighed resignedly and looked up toward the ceiling. "Yeah, it's all over the Ministry now, not to mention the paperwork that's gone to Hogwarts." He then looked to Luna and shook his head, "In the past I'd rail against Fate for this, but you know, this isn't her fault. I just wish Amelia could have investigated the name further is all."

"It wouldn't have helped Halstead," Ginny spoke up as she looked into his eyes. He could see she was trying to help and smiled sadly in return. "Charles just said no one knew about the history of the Founder lines. And look what little documentation was found in the DOM library. The three of you searched forever and couldn't find

anything at all. There was nothing she could do.” This was echoed by Charles’s and Neville’s nodding.

“That’s one reason James doesn’t know about his lineage. The best way to hide is to tell only the heir of the line, and only when he reaches his legal majority, which is 17. That’s why, to be honest, I’m very shocked you knew of it.”

“To be honest Grandfather, I didn’t know for sure. But my headmaster in the future mentioned that only a true Gryffindor could retrieve Godric’s Sword from where it was, and I was able to. That and a few other things led me to that conclusion. Not that I have any idea what it does for me, but I have a feeling that Hogwarts itself likes me.”

“I don’t even want to know why you would need that sword,” Grace exclaimed. Ron simply nodded to the older woman and agreed with her that she didn’t.

Harry was pretty much spent, but was able to give an ironic smile, “I had to kill a basilisk,” he said much to the woman’s horror. Charles just looked between Harry and Ginny, then nodded grimly before Harry continued. “So anyway, any ideas what we can do now? I mean, we should have some kind of plan to deal with this, shouldn’t we?”

Ron had a small frown on his face for some time as he was apparently thinking. When Harry asked that question he said, “I think I might have sort of a solution. It’s not the best in the world, and it’s pretty perilous, but it’s something anyway.” Ron waited for a few moments for a go ahead before continuing, “Charles, the Ministry is supposed to be looking for a place for us, or a family for us to go to. To be honest, Harry could use a real family of his very own to help with his healing, both for the public reasons and the private ones. If I’m right, you’re listed as a consultant mind healer for St. Mungos, right?” Another nod from Charles and Ron decided to pitch his idea, “Then as the Penwells are at the very least a prominent Pure Blood family, it is customary for another family to step forward and put an orphan under their protection in cases like this one. You could do that

for all of us. I don't mean to be assuming things I shouldn't, but it would be for the best emotionally, and if you let it be known that Halstead is under the protection of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter, someone would think twice of just killing him the first time he was out by himself. That and we practice some vigilance, and we should be covered as much as we can."

Harry sat on pins and needles, not quite daring to hope Charles would agree with this plan. Would his grandfather want him around? And what about the others? Harry was waiting for what seemed like forever but in fact was a few moments before Charles nodded. "The Manor wards are some of the strongest anywhere, and we should be safe enough. To be honest, on a purely emotional level, I wouldn't even entertain any other thoughts other than to have Halstead, and by extension you all, here with us. Very good idea Mr. Whitcomb. What do you say dear?"

Grace had, if the look on her face was any indication, made up her mind the moment Ron finished. "If you had balked dear, you would have been sleeping on the couch." This statement relieved Harry greatly.

Harry was the final one to speak up on this decision, but he could knowing he had the support of both of his ladies in his decision. "I think I can speak for us all when I say I'd love that." His smile turned happy as his heart made the first connections with his family, and indeed none of his friends had anything bad to say about this suggestion. The rest of the hour before the team's departure was spent making plans as to when they would move in (scheduled for after their O.W.L.'s) and sleeping and living arrangements for the team. When they returned to their quarters, Harry hugged each of them emotionally and went to bed with the first pleasant dreams he had in quite a while.

Chapter 6: Pre-Hogwarts Daze

Team Gamma Ready Room
Department of Mysteries
London, England
July 31, 1975
Ginny's POV

Ginny woke up that morning both tired and anxious. All six time-travelers had spent the last three days going through their O.W.L.'s, with Harry, Hermione, Ron, and Neville having gone through them for the second time. Ginny would have thought that would make the other four more calm about the entire process, but that really could not be further from the truth. Even Hermione, who Ginny could swear up and down had gotten all O's on her first set was nervous, and could be seen cramming along with the rest of them at all times during the tests, unless she was actively taking one. That was not to say that Ginny herself wasn't nervous during this time. If truth be told, and she would deny this whenever possible, she was probably a hair's breath from a nervous breakdown during each of their tests. She had, after all, only been a fourth year when they came back, and both she and Luna had to cram a year's worth of knowledge within a month's time. She was sure she was going to fail.

For this reason, more than any other, Ginny was very glad that their results would be available today. According to the unspeakables the proctors for the exams, including Griselda Marchbanks, had spent all night last night reviewing and grading the tests they had gone through. Thus the scores would be available later this morning, so instead of training they were all seated in the team's ready room. Ginny for one was nervous for various reasons besides these tests, and she could tell she was not alone. A lot had happened in the past two months, and many of Ginny's previous perceptions did not stand the trials they had all faced.

The DOM battle had been bad enough, and Ginny was happy she got out with as few injuries as she had. After all, Hermione was nearly killed, and Ron nearly got himself possessed. The fact that she nearly lost her best friend and her brother at the same time was not something that went by unnoticed. In fact, she cried for days before

they had gone back to The Burrow. Then her mother started to yell at them for going in the first place, and Ginny nearly lost it right there. Never before had she wanted to Bat Bogey someone before like she did her mum. The only thing that stopped her at that time was the presence of the Unspeakables, who took both her and her brother away. If their presence and insistence that they go with them wasn't confusing enough, the fact that her father, who was normally as protective of her as Ron (but in his own way), not only did not attempt to stop them but actually kept her mom from interfering as well. Add to that the box he handed Ron, and what the Unspeakables had told them about why they were needed, and Ginny did not have a good feeling about much of anything.

At first that feeling of impending doom proved to be correct. Harry was near death. Even though she had told Hermione the truth when she said she gave up on him and got over her crush, she still considered Harry to be like a brother to her. To see him lying on the bed looking like a bad piece of dragon meat had nearly shattered her. Add to that the great heart wrenching sobs and keening from Luna and Hermione, and the entire package threatened to completely overwhelm her. All she could do is hug both Neville and Ron as tightly as she could and murmur a prayer for anything and everything over and over again. Then, when they said his heart stopped, it felt like hers had stopped as well. The only thing that existed at that point was Luna's and Hermione's keening which kept getting louder and louder. Ron and Neville both seemed to seize up tighter than if they were under Petrificus Totalus, which was a good thing considering she was nearly squeezing the air out of them both. But she had to give whoever Firebrand was some credit, she never gave up. A minute later she announced Harry's return, and the spirits of the people in the room seemed to burst at the seams with a new hope. Then Harry was stabilized, and both boys she was holding onto collapsed with relief, taking her with them. After a couple hours of solemn contemplation as they watched the medical team stabilize Harry, nearly all of them went to their new rooms. Luna and Hermione would not budge until physically forced to by Raptor, who was the only one that could touch them without fear of losing something important.

As the days had gone by while they waited for Harry to awaken, Ginny started to notice a few changes in the dynamics of the “Ministry Six.” Ron became introspective almost to the point of brooding, Neville seemed to flip between watching Harry and watching her, and Luna and Hermione never left Harry’s side willingly. She of course found out on the second day of Harry’s unconsciousness why Ron was brooding, despite his not wanting to tell her. But, as sometimes happened, Ron forgot just how stubborn Ginny could get especially where family is involved. So eventually he told her, all the while seeming to prepare for rejection. As if she could ever reject Ron for something like that, after all they were brother and sister. So she quickly assured Ron that she would be with him through all of this. She reminded him that he was still her brother, and family doesn’t abandon family. It wasn’t too long after that she confronted Neville about his following her, and found out about his feelings for her. She originally asked for some time, but quickly discovered she could indeed like him in the way he liked her, and told him exactly that. They promised to take things slow, especially with all the things that were going on around them.

That left Hermione and Luna. It became very obvious to Ginny that the two had feelings for Harry, and that Luna had feelings for Hermione as well. Hermione, having grown up muggle, appeared uncomfortable when Luna got too familiar, but her fears and feelings for Harry seemed to quell anything else pretty quickly. Thus began what was later to prove a three-way love dance that had Ron confused, Neville surprised, and herself becoming a sounding board for Hermione. Even after they came back in time and the blow-up occurred, and Hermione seemed to start to try to accept things, Ginny wound up spending a lot of time simply being there to help with her insecurities. The poor older woman knew she had feelings for the two others, and found herself more often than not able to relax with them around, but her muggle upbringing was simply too strong to ignore. Even when she was at her most comfortable she had to admit that the muggle world’s homophobia would nag her in the back of her mind. Unfortunately this was one area where the Magical World, as Harry called it, was better than the Muggle. Such relationships were somewhat accepted here, even while they were very frowned upon in the muggle world, so there weren’t too many avenues to help someone like her deal with the reality of the situation. So the older

teen would try to work through things on her own, only to become frustrated and short tempered. Thus she sought Ginny out as an outside source of help. Even though she could only barely admit to herself she loved them both, she vowed to try to come to terms with her upbringing. It wasn't easy, this Ginny could see. Thus her role would continue for some time to come.

But even that was put on hold after this last weekend's revelations, and the O.W.L.'s of this week. The news Harry received was a double edged sword. He received good news and a family, but at the same time he learned he was yet again in danger in a world which he should have been safe. Ginny began to suspect that this was just another typical part of Harry's life and would remain so until he overcame the forces against him. Harry himself seemed to agree, though he never said anything. Instead he threw himself into preparing for the discussions that would be happening this afternoon, and the moving that they would all be undertaking tomorrow.

Ginny was shaken out of her thoughts when the door opened to reveal Jason and Madam Marchbanks. The team was in their unspeakable robes, with a glamor over them to make them look like normal wizard's robes. The later held a packet filled with papers which she began to sort out and place in front of each person. Everyone sat straighter as they gave the to older people their attention.

"Well, I will say this much, not a single one of you do anything in halves," Jason started as he closed the doors. The head unspeakable seemed ironically amused as he continued, "I will only say none of you failed and then turn you over to Ms. Marchbanks so she can let you know your scores."

Griselda nodded once and then looked around and smiled to each person in the room. "I can give you each the standard letter, or make a projection that will show everyone's scores at the same time. Which do you wish?" After a brief discussion, they all indicated it would be better to just show them all at the same time. Ms. Marchbanks acknowledged this by placing a pensieve on a small table in the center of the room. She tapped her wand, and all the scores were presented at once.

Ordinary Wizarding Level Results

Pass Grades:

(O) Outstanding
(E) Exceeds Expectations
(A) Acceptable

Fail Grades:

(P) Poor
(D) Dreadful
(T) Troll

(N/A) Did Not Test

(X) Test did not have this portion

Haleigh Joyce Galway

Ancient Runes
Theoretical = O
Practical = O
Overall = O

Arithmancy
Theoretical = O
Practical = X
Overall = O*

Astronomy
Theoretical = O
Practical = X
Overall = O

Care of Magical Creatures
Theoretical = O
Practical = O
Overall = O

Charms

Theoretical = O

Practical = O

Overall = O

Defense Against the Dark Arts

Theoretical = O

Practical = O

Overall = O

Divination

Theoretical = N/A

Practical = N/A

Overall = N/A

Herbology

Theoretical = O

Practical = O

Overall = O

History of Magic

Theoretical = O

Practical = X

Overall = O

Muggle Studies

Theoretical = O

Practical = X

Overall = O

Transfiguration

Theoretical = O

Practical = O

Overall = O

Potions

Theoretical = O

Practical = O

Overall = O

Combined
Theoretical = O
Practical = O
Active = O
Passive = O

Total O.W.L.'s = 11

Nathan Lambeth

Ancient Runes
Theoretical = N/A
Practical = N/A
Overall = N/A

Arithmancy
Theoretical = E
Practical = X
Overall = E

Astronomy
Theoretical = E
Practical = X
Overall = E

Care of Magical Creatures
Theoretical = O
Practical = E
Overall = O

Charms
Theoretical = E
Practical = A
Overall = E

Defense Against the Dark Arts
Theoretical = E
Practical = O
Overall = E

Divination

Theoretical = N/A

Practical = N/A

Overall = N/A

Herbology

Theoretical = O

Practical = O

Overall = O*

History of Magic

Theoretical = A

Practical = X

Overall = A

Muggle Studies

Theoretical = N/A

Practical = N/A

Overall = N/A

Transfiguration

Theoretical = A

Practical = E

Overall = E

Potions

Theoretical = E

Practical = O

Overall = O

Combined

Theoretical = E

Practical = E

Active = E

Passive = O

Total O.W.L.'s = 9

Lilith Leedham

Ancient Runes
Theoretical = E
Practical = E
Overall = E

Arithmancy
Theoretical = N/A
Practical = N/A
Overall = N/A

Astronomy
Theoretical = E
Practical = E
Overall = E

Care of Magical Creatures
Theoretical = E
Practical = O
Overall = O

Charms
Theoretical = O
Practical = O
Overall = O

Defense Against the Dark Arts
Theoretical = E
Practical = E
Overall = E

Divination
Theoretical = O
Practical = O
Overall = O*

Herbology
Theoretical = E
Practical = E
Overall = E

History of Magic

Theoretical = E

Practical = X

Overall = E

Muggle Studies

Theoretical = E

Practical = X

Overall = E

Transfiguration

Theoretical = O

Practical = E

Overall = O

Potions

Theoretical = E

Practical = E

Overall = E

Combined

Theoretical = E

Practical = E

Active = O

Passive = E

Total O.W.L.'s = 11

Halstead Jerimiah Penwell

Ancient Runes

Theoretical = N/A

Practical = N/A

Overall = N/A

Arithmancy

Theoretical = N/A

Practical = N/A

Overall = N/A

Astronomy

Theoretical = A

Practical = X

Overall = E

Care of Magical Creatures

Theoretical = E

Practical = E

Overall = E

Charms

Theoretical = E

Practical = E

Overall = E

Defense Against the Dark Arts

Theoretical = O

Practical = O

Overall = O*

Divination

Theoretical = A

Practical = A

Overall = A

Herbology

Theoretical = E

Practical = E

Overall = E

History of Magic

Theoretical = A

Practical = X

Overall = A

Muggle Studies

Theoretical = E

Practical = X

Overall = E

Transfiguration

Theoretical = E

Practical = O

Overall = O

Potions

Theoretical = E

Practical = O

Overall = O

Combined

Theoretical = E

Practical = O

Active = O

Passive = E

Total O.W.L.'s = 10

Gwyneth Melynda Whitcomb

Ancient Runes

Theoretical = E

Practical = E

Overall = E

Arithmancy

Theoretical = O

Practical = X

Overall = O

Astronomy

Theoretical = E

Practical = X

Overall = E

Care of Magical Creatures

Theoretical = N/A

Practical = N/A

Overall = N/A

Charms

Theoretical = E

Practical = O

Overall = O

Defense Against the Dark Arts

Theoretical = E

Practical = O

Overall = E

Divination

Theoretical = N/A

Practical = N/A

Overall = N/A

Herbology

Theoretical = E

Practical = E

Overall = E

History of Magic

Theoretical = A

Practical = X

Overall = A

Muggle Studies

Theoretical = O

Practical = X

Overall = O

Transfiguration

Theoretical = E

Practical = E

Overall = E

Potions

Theoretical = A

Practical = E

Overall = A

Combined

Theoretical = E

Practical = E

Active = E

Passive = E

Total O.W.L.'s = 10

Ryan Bartholomew Whitcomb

Ancient Runes

Theoretical = N/A

Practical = N/A

Overall = N/A

Arithmancy

Theoretical = N/A

Practical = N/A

Overall = N/A

Astronomy

Theoretical = A

Practical = X

Overall = A

Care of Magical Creatures

Theoretical = E

Practical = E

Overall = E

Charms

Theoretical = E

Practical = E

Overall = E

Defense Against the Dark Arts

Theoretical = E

Practical = O

Overall = O

Divination

Theoretical = A

Practical = A

Overall = A

Herbology

Theoretical = A

Practical = E

Overall = A

History of Magic

Theoretical = E

Practical = X

Overall = E

Muggle Studies

Theoretical = N/A

Practical = N/A

Overall = N/A

Transfiguration

Theoretical = A

Practical = E

Overall = A

Potions

Theoretical = E

Practical = O

Overall = E

Combined

Theoretical = E

Practical = E

Active = E

Passive = E

Total O.W.L.'s = 9

Active courses are Charms, Defense, Transfiguration + Ancient Runes if Applicable

Passive Courses are Potions, History, Herbology + Muggle Studies if Applicable

O* =In examiner's stated opinion, student is operating at N.E.W.T. or Higher levels

At first Ginny was shocked and a little saddened by her scores, especially when Luna had done better on the test than she did. But the more she thought about it more she realized that Luna was a Ravenclaw, and a Seeress, so it was only natural. Also the results were all outstanding considering they had only 2 months to fill in an entire year's worth of courses. So all in all she had no reason to be upset about her scores at all. This managed to uplift her spirits some, so she looked around to see Ron's expressions mirroring her feelings. Ron had been going through so much that Ginny had to help him with his studies, so she silently congratulated him with a smile and a thumbs up.

"Can I have your attention please?" Ms. Marchbanks called. The quiet chattering stopped completely as the group returned their attention toward the education matron. "First I'd like to congratulate everyone for a job well done. There's not a single failing grade on this test. That said, Mistery Lambeth and Penwell, along with Madams Galway and Leedham, may take any N.E.W.T.'s that they took an O.W.L. Test for. Any they didn't take the test for, and wish to take anyway, they may take the sixth and seventh year's O.W.L. level classes and take O.W.L.'s on them when they take their N.E.W.T.'s. Mister Whitcomb can take N.E.W.T. level courses in: Astronomy, Care for Magical Creatures, Charms, Defense against the Dark Arts, and Potions. Madam Whitcomb may take N.E.W.T.'s in: Ancient Runes, Arithmancy, Astronomy, Charms, Defense against the Dark Arts, Herbology, History, Muggle Studies, and Transfiguration." Ginny nodded as her choices were laid out for her and considered herself doing very well that only one N.E.W.T. was restricted from her.

"This of course does not cover new electives available to N.E.W.T. level students. These include Politics, Law, Accounting and Estate Management, University Preparation, Basic Psychology, and Healing

Studies. Please be aware that Healing Studies requires you to be eligible for both Charms and Potions N.E.W.T.'s." She picked up a stack of forms and passed them out to all the team mates as she continued talking, "The forms I'm passing out now are registration forms for your sixth year classes. You will note you have to take a minimum of five and a maximum of seven classes for the year. I would stress you keep in mind what you want to do when you leave school when you select your courses. If any of you need help deciding what you're going to . . ."

At this point Jason cleared his throat, causing all of the team and Ms. Marchbanks to look at him. "They have someone scheduled to come in after you for career counseling."

A simple nod of the head by the older woman indicated that she was not insulted as she continued, "Very well. While I would normally give you a lot of time to decide, the normal deadline for class registration ends today. I am not able to extend this date, and therefore must have these forms in my office no later than 5 P.M. Does anyone have any questions?"

Rarely does anyone beat Hermione when it comes to raising a hand for a question, but in this case Ginny just managed to do it. Ms. Marchbanks apparently preferred to be logical in the order of selection, and chose the first one to raise their hand. Ginny looked down at her form and asked, "What is University Preparation?"

"University Preparation is a preparatory class put together primarily for Muggleborns who wish to attend a Muggle University. This includes taking the A level courses and tests required by the Muggle school system to apply for and to attend University," Ms. Marchbanks answered rather formally. "It is not a very popular class, and some years it doesn't even meet for lack of interest. This is one reason we require advanced notice on course selection. Any other questions?"

Ginny didn't quite understand the answer, but she figured she could ask Hermione later. Instead she and everyone else nodded. With a final goodbye, Madam Marchbanks left, the door closing behind her with an audible click. The room fell silent for a short time as everyone looked through their paperwork. "So, what is everyone wanting to

ultimately do with their life, in medium or long term?" Jason asked into the very quiet room.

"Well my future's pretty much set," Harry commented in a half-resigned and half-ironic chuckle. "I've got to be the savior and leader of the new future. Along with everyone else of course." The room had a strange mix of reactions when he said that, both Hermione and Luna looked at him with sad expressions, most others having a grim but sympathetic look on their faces.

"I don't know about that Halstead, maybe you should find something for at least a hobby?" Hermione replied as she reached out and touched his shoulder. He jumped slightly, but Hermione seemed to ignore it. Ginny supposed she'd be like that too, if she'd had his life. Just another thing Dumbledore had to answer for in her opinion. "Personally, there's more I'd like to do than save the world. I'd kind of like to be a Spell Crafter. I mean, I'm already a decent Arithmancer, but I'd like to put it to use."

Luna seemed to agree with this as she spoke up next, "You mean besides raising a family? I would like to work with the Press. Maybe in some of the more far reaching magical ones." Ginny couldn't help but to wink at Luna as she made her plans known. It was so obvious she was looking at journalism for The Quibbler to those that knew her best that it actually set off a round of giggling in the room. Luna gave a mock affronted look, which caused Harry and Hermione to lose it completely and roll about in their chairs. Luna huffed and smacked them both on the shoulder while telling them to behave.

"I'd like to do more with Herbology, maybe add some Creature breeding as well," Neville added with just a slight bit of nervousness. Ginny couldn't help but to reach over and squeeze his hand in support and whisper a few words of encouragement in his ear.

"I know this is going to sound mental," Ron spoke up before Ginny could, "Especially since I really haven't done much studying in the past five years, but I'd kind of like to be a historian myself, or maybe something to do with laws . . ." Nearly everyone's mouth dropped at

that, including Ginny's. She was about to let go of Neville's hand and check Ron for a temperature or some sign of imperius curse when he surprised everyone by translating the looks he was getting. "What? Look, I've learned my lesson when it came to studying, especially history. Not to mention that I find I'm actually enjoying it. I mean, the textbooks we use are boring and all, but the books I research actually make them more like stories than anything else, so they're actually interesting."

Hermione of course nearly squealed and jumped over to hug Ron, which caused a few moments of laughter throughout the group. After Hermione calmed down, Luna turned to Ginny and asked her what she wanted to do. Ginny found herself a little unprepared for the question. She had an idea in its loosest form, but she had to sit there for a few minutes and think it through before she answered, "I think I'd like to be a sort of Mind Healer, but combine muggle techniques and theories with the magical."

This of course started a discussion amongst the room of all the pluses and minuses of each person's choices, and the classes they'd have to take. The Unspeakables reminded them that they would be working on Defense, Politics, and University level classes here, as well as a few different advanced specialty courses as well, so if they could not fit a class they needed into their schedules, they could always work upon it here. With that said, everyone decided to go with Charms and Defense, with everyone but Ron taking Transfiguration as well. Hermione of course had the hardest choices to make, and wound up choosing Arithmancy, Ancient Runes, Healing Studies and Potions for a full course load. She also requested from Jason to add Herbology and University Prep lessons during the summer months. Harry also made himself equally as busy by adding potions, politics, muggle studies and law to his listing, as well as adding history and mind arts for his summer loads. Luna of course would always be a Ravenclaw at heart and added Care, Basic Psychology, Divination and potions to her listing for the school year, adding muggle studies and journalism for her summer months.

Neville and Ginny took a while to decide what they wanted to do, and Ron went over and talked to Harry. Finally Ron went first, obviously starting with history, but also adding law, politics, care of magical

creatures, and potions to his list. For his summer months he asked to join Harry in mind arts as well as adding battle tactics to his listing. Finally Ginny and her boyfriend were ready to mark their choices. Unfortunately the only other class they would share would be basic psychology. Neville surprised everyone by continuing with potions along with the less surprising herbology, care and accounting. He asked for additional training in politics and university prep during the summer. Ginny, after reviewing her goal aims, decided to go with basic psychology, arithmancy, ancient runes, and university prep. She also had a couple of summer courses to add, which included mind arts and making up for her low scores by taking potions and healing studies.

After Jason took everyone's lists and summer requests, he stuffed them into a folder and finally looked about the room. After congratulating them again on their achievements, he dismissed them to pack while he took the paperwork to the registrar's office.

Forbidden Forest, Northwest Side
Potter Reserve
Scotland
August 7, 1975
Neville's POV

Team Gamma had spent the last week moving into Potter Manor and completing registration for Hogwarts. It was an interesting study in both interior and exterior dynamics for the team, as many decisions had to be made about how they would do things. Not the least of which was how much, if anything, to tell Harry's dad and godfather. After talking with Charles, they decided that they would not tell the younger Potters anything at the moment. Instead they would wait until if and when it was necessary for them to know. In the end the duo were told the same cover story that the press was told yesterday: they were survivors from Ravenshire that the Head of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Potter was taking them under his wings and protection. This confused James who was of the opinion they didn't need any such protections based upon what he was told, but

he accepted it anyways. The press was due to release their articles today.

They had waited a week for the press release to ensure that there were no complications in their acceptance into Hogwarts. Jason, Charles and Harry had planned things so the meeting where the board discussed their admittance was the one meeting where Dumbledore would not be present. Both Charles and Harry had agreed that the old man was best kept in the dark until their entry was a fact, but each for different reasons. Harry wanted the secret kept due to his (and everyone else's) ever-growing distrust of the man. Charles had another reason which he was not very open to discussing. Instead, he'd only say that the Headmaster and he did not see eye to eye on a few issues, and feared that the older man would try to get them under the auspices of Hogwarts completely, which was something that COULD NOT happen as far as everyone was concerned. It appeared that Dumbledore had been trying to do so already, and had been seeking them since the first reports came in. But the names of the survivors was kept as a closely held secret, one not even the Chief Warlock could get out of the DMLE. He would find out their information today of course, which was something Neville was extremely nervous about. Once again the team would be embroiled in a web of mystery and danger, something Neville had avoided for the better part of four years. In the end it was unavoidable though, as during that time he had grown closer to Harry, and Neville would be damned if he let his friend down now. Besides which, Ginny was right there with him, and he couldn't leave her here alone if he tried. So the only thing they could do now is train for the times when their protections would run thin.

And today's training was going to be a big part of that. Not to mention it was something that Neville had been looking forward to. Today they would begin their animagus training. The tests to see if they had a form was done a couple of days ago, and the results were in. They all had animagus forms, and they would be taking those forms today. There was known to be two ways to become an animagus. The first was the same way Professor McGonagall used, meditation and spellwork. This way was slow and arduous, taking a couple of years to complete. People who used this way were called "type 1 animagi" by ministry officials. They had their forms, but the forms were still

completely controlled by the human mind. That was good in many aspects, but the natural instincts, and therefore the communication patterns were only available when in animal state, and only then after months of studying the real thing. This was not an option for the team, both time and purpose pretty much nixed that.

This led to the second kind of animagus: "type 2 animagi," which were considered more dangerous by the Ministry. The decision to use this way was not easy, and some members, mainly Hermione and Luna, were rather reticent of this method. But after they were briefed of its advantages, they all voted to take this route despite the difficulty the process caused. A person taking this route could achieve the transformation within 6 days, with complete control over the transformation itself once the initial transformation was complete. The problem there was once the person was transformed the human side had to establish control over the animal form's reasoning. The animagus was both human and animal, and yet more than that. At first the animal's instincts would have complete control and would have to literally be wrestled into submission by the human side. But this did not last forever, for after the first three weeks to three months the animal side would be under control, and the animagus would be completely in control of themselves at all times.

Even though the second way was harder, and required special handling, the type 2 animagus had certain advantages over the type one. First, they were instantly recognized by other creatures of their type as being one of them. There was no awkwardness over proper posturing or communication. They were that creature, with all advantages and disadvantages the animal possessed. Secondly, the advantages of the animal form would transfer to the human host in greater amounts, allowing in many cases for improved eyesight, taste, touch, reflexes, or whatever else the animal in question had over the default human state. Finally the animagus in question could communicate with any animal in the same family as their type while in human form. A cat animagus could talk to any member of the feline family, including the greater cats. The only danger with this was of course you smelled like your animagus form to them, so if someone like McGonagall were to try to talk to a lion, she would have to be careful to avoid the threat of being a snack.

The unspeakables had explained all of this to Team Gamma, and left the decision up to them but with a very strong recommendation to take the second route. The team only took about a half hour to agree, especially with Harry convincing his bond-mates. Once they informed their superiors, they were given one admonishment: type 2 animagus training was considered illegal within the borders of the British Ministry. The reason given to the very few people who asked about it (the knowledge of this method was so suppressed it didn't even show up on the registration form) was the lack of control the wizard had in animal forms. Period. So people were led to believe that any type 2 animagus had no control over their forms when transformed ever, and therefore were just a step down from werewolves. Thus they would have to be careful with their powers and the proof of their transformations. In other words, the totems that were made upon the completion of their first transformation would have to be hidden.

This did not deter the team at all, so for the past five days they were given a series of potions and kept in the temporary quarters again. The reason for their isolation was primarily because the potions given out before the final ritual, while meant to make the transformations easier, were highly hallucinogenic in nature. Charles had stopped therapy for Ginny and Harry during this time because of this. Instead he had set up at the edge of the Potter Reserve for the ritual and adjust the work schedules of his employees to keep their plans secret. Neville found it interesting that the Potters had a magical animal reserve that contained part of the Forbidden Forest on the opposite side of Hogwarts. At least that meant that the area and ingredients for the training were naturally available, and the danger of running into Muggles or even other Magical Beings were almost non-existent. And since it was a magical area, the Ministry's tracers could not find any wand magic quite that easily even if they were scanning this area. Neville liked this, for he was worried when they first moved in at the Potters they would have to sneak around to practice out of the Ministry, but here they could practice easily.

So here they were, at the edges of the Forbidden Forest near what appeared to be an old rounded shack. Neville couldn't remember what it was called, but someone said something about a sweat lodge or something like that. There wasn't really a door, more like a light leather flap pointed toward the forest. In fact, the shack was pretty

much built right at the edge of the forest. He remembered the old American man talking about them needing to hunt, and what they killed would be important. There would be people following them to ensure they would not get lost, and that they would be able to be transformed back. Even if one of them was a large flying predator, they would be ready. Neville really hoped so, for it would be kind of bad if they got in over their heads against some kind of magical creature in there. He knew the others had thought of that from the looks on their faces, so Neville gave them all a smile and headed toward the “front” of the shack and headed in, passing through a few wards designed to keep the animals from rounding back toward the house.

A few moments later everyone was settled down in various shades of nervousness and dehydration. They weren't allowed food for the past 36 hours, and water only sparingly since that point. Ron, amazingly enough, only complained once every 2 hours he was awake, and even then only mildly. They were all so hungry Neville wondered what would happen when they actually went out. How much would they eat? What would they eat? That was his last full thought though as the ritual started, and a bone bowl full of some potion was passed round. They all took a sip of the liquid, which ran through them like liquid fire. One by one they started to fall over as bowls of water was placed out of their reach. Not that he heard them personally, but animalistic screams started to fill the lodge as each person in turn started to change.

As each person changed they were collared and moved out toward the forest. First was Ginny, who took off toward the woods without hesitation. Her smallish and lithe form quickly got lost in the foliage. Neville's ears lost her at that point, and he didn't get a good look as to what she was. Next there was a screech heard throughout the lodge, and Neville thought he smelled bird. Luna, at least the parts of her he could see that was still human, was led out with both a collar and something on her foot. Soon after that Neville started to feel really heavy and a low, rumbling growl escaped his thick throat. He was collared and taken out, though there was nothing touching him. He wondered how he could not feel the ground and yet move at the same time. His body rotated until his feet were downward, and right after that he could feel himself hit the ground. He could smell several

things in the air, some of them more dangerous than others. But what he could smell most, and what he needed most, was water. He started lumbering toward the smell, and eventually came to a small stream. Within it he could see and smell fish, but right now his thirst outweighed everything else. So he extended his tongue and started to drink.

Off in the distance he heard a loud roar, not unlike that of a large lizard. Neville picked up his head and smelled the air, and felt the scent of large lizard was far off. A smaller reptile was nearer, but not headed in his direction. He did smell rabbit, and deer, as well as smaller rodents. His stomach was telling him he needed to eat now that he drank. His mind briefly considered the fish, but he could smell tasty plants nearby. They would be easier to get, so he lumbered over toward them. The plants here were not exactly what he wanted, but they were good enough and would start to fill him. So after taking another sniff of the air to make sure he was safe, and only smelled humans in the distance, his stomach over-ruled his caution and so he started to eat.

Suddenly he heard a growl from above him. It sounded feline, and Neville jerked up, his eyes desperately searching for the intruder. It was too late though as he felt a weight land on his back and something sharp trying to get into his hide. His skin hardened as he rose onto his back legs, taking the feline with him. He heard a crunch and a yowl as he backed into the tree next to him, and the weight came off. He turned around amazingly quickly, seeing a cougar there. Suddenly Neville wanted meat, and here was meat before him. His claws extended further, becoming about half again the size of his massive paws. These claws could easily dig through solid rock, so this cat would not be a problem. The cat jumped to the side and then used a tree to launch itself at him, but he pivoted and swiped with his claw. The claw cut deeply into the cat's throat, and it fell to earth twitching. Neville then came forward with his massive jaws, the front upper and lower two being at least half a foot long as they sank into the neck of the cat and snapped its neck. The cat stopped spasming, and Neville started to eat.

Suddenly the smell of human was a lot closer. He raised his head and a deep guttural rumble echoed in the forest, heard here even

over the howl of a wolf. "Easy there . . . Come . . . friends . . ." Neville felt two impacts, and he swung around to defend himself, only to be hit by four more. These humans were pointing sticks at him, and something was hitting him. He hauled himself up to full height so he could attack the closest one. Suddenly he felt something tighten around his throat as four more impacts hit his body. His eyesight began to fade, and he took a step forward. The pressure increased and another four impacts hit him, and he fell, his vision going black.

"To . . ." a voice sounded out after some time later. "Cave . . . I don't . . . it. Magical form . . . not possible . . . four of them . . . if you count . . . Owl." His body felt lighter now, and his eyes flickered as the human noises came back into focus. Someone noticed he was awake and came over to him. "Nathan?" What was this Nathan? He tried to concentrate as the noise continued, and slowly started coming back to him. His name was Neville, not Nathan. Wait, it was Nathan as well. This person was calling him Nathan. Why? Who could call him Nathan? Time. That's right, he's back in time. He made it through the transformation, and now he was human himself. He felt a presence in the back of his mind. It was strong, tough, maybe a little slow unless fighting, and for the moment satiated. Then he felt his stomach, and the contents of the plants and cat therein. "Nathan, can you hear me? Don't speak, just blink." The voice distracted him from wanting to throw up, which was good because his stomach seemed determined. He nodded his head slowly, and the voice answered back. "How many fingers am I holding up?" Neville considered this for a moment, then blinked three times. "Prop him up," the voice said. A container of liquid was pressed to his lips, and something cool and soothing flowed down his throat.

Neville started coughing after he drank the potion, sending spittle everywhere. Finally the coughing fit stopped and Neville looked up. "Is everyone okay?" he croaked out. The men tending him told him that yes, everyone was fine. The team would be gathered up once they were able to move, and would be told their forms by Jason. Neville then began wondering about their identities, and how trade could be kept around these people, for they could see their assumed faces. Then he remembered they had volunteered to be obliterated after the fact. Their identities were safe. Soon they were robed in their Unspeakable robes and left inside the hut, which had been cooled

down after everyone had been dragged out. Before him were bits of plant and a cougar carcass. He looked around the room and found everyone else's eyes slowly refocusing. Ginny had what appeared to be a dead, partially eaten rabbit in front of her, same as Luna's. Ron seemed to have a partially-digested badger in front of him, one that looked like it had been swallowed whole. The only people who did not have a some dead animal in front of them were Hermione and Harry. They both sat behind what appeared to be a huge pile of meat, bones and sinew. On top a rather large heart sat in a nest of rather scaly skin that looked incredibly tough. If Neville didn't know better, he could have sworn it was dragon hide.

His thoughts and inspections were interrupted by Jason who cleared his throat as he entered the hut. "I said it before, and I'll say it again, you kids . . . No, you're not kids, not after today. You young people don't do anything in halves. I hope you all realize that four or maybe five of you broke several of what we had thought were unbreakable natural laws today. Selene is the only one we are sure of, meaning her form is the most common of the bunch of you. If you'll notice the rabbit in front of you," he said as he turned his head to look at Ginny, "That was your first kill. You're a fox animagus. Your identifying feature is your eye color, which does not change from the brown that you normally have. But don't feel bad, for you're having a normal form is likely to enable you to be best at moving around undetected in espionage situations, unlike just about everyone else here." Neville could tell this had done the trick to mollify her sense of disappointment, for her face seemed to radiate pride at that.

"The rest of you are in for a shock, so I'll take it one person at a time. Athena, while your form would ordinarily not be too noticeable, with you being a snowy owl, your form is about half again the size of a normal owl of the same species. Besides size, your identifying feature is the slightly bulging eyes that you have transfers to the owl as well. Even the animal side of you seems to be more intelligent than normal owls, and about twice the intelligence of a postal owl of the same variety. We don't know if your form is magical or not, but we do know that you'll stand out even amongst a flight of owls." Luna seemed to be her normal dreamy self at this pronouncement, though there was a sense of curiosity on her face. She nodded once, looking rather contemplative as Jason moved on.

“Next we go to Liber. You’ll have to avoid the muggle world in your animal form, for they think your breed is extinct. You’re a cave bear. Cave bears are magical creatures found mainly in parts of North America, though Germany has a very small grouping of them. They are social creatures and omnivores. They’ll eat both plants and animals, in fact they seem to keep both in their diet. Their claws are fully retractable, but your front teeth are saber toothed. Your bear form can toughen his skin to about the same toughness as the graphorn. Your claws are razor sharp and capable of digging through solid rock, and despite your size and obvious strength you are capable of magically enhancing your speed for very short distances or in cases of fights. This makes you very hard to kill and very spell resistant. The cave bear is also able to render themselves invisible, though with your weight soft ground will show your foot prints. The top of your head is a lighter color than the rest of you. It appears to be blond, so that would be your identifying characteristic. There are no known cave bears in Britain, so you’ll stand out like a sore thumb in your animagus form, so be careful.” Neville thought about this for several moments, then grinned widely. Though being able to hide amongst other bears would be hard, his form was particularly suited to fighting. Overall, he was happy with his form.

“Sun Tsu, your form managed to scare the crap out of the operatives who had to handle you. We had keep reminding them that we had no way of knowing what your form would be, for one of your assistants was an ophidiophobic. You are an occamy.” Ron shuddered slightly at this. While he was not afraid of snakes, it was not hard to see where his link to them came from, and that association was something Ron was still working on. “Luckily enough you are a male occamy, so you don’t have to worry about your eggs. Just bear in mind that most wizards and witches in Britain think occamies are rather aggressive in nature, and your bite can either paralyze or kill, depending upon your wishes. Your identifying characteristic is some spots on your face resembling your freckles.”

Hermione looked to the pile of purplish meat between her and Harry, and then paled as she looked back up to Jason. “Pheobe and Charlemagne, you two have perhaps the strangest of the forms. Both

of your animals are very intelligent, almost bordering on human, and at the same time very dangerous. Pheobe however had the most unusual reaction in this group, for she went after not one but two things, only the first of which was actually typical prey.” It was then that Hermione noticed a broken body of a ferret, one that did not even look chewed upon. “The first thing you killed was a ferret, which you caught in your fore-claws. But before you could eat it, you heard a scream from some distance west of you and took off, ignoring the dead ferret. We picked it up and followed, but soon came to a stop when you entered the clearing and went after the same thing Charlemagne did. We found this extremely unusual for a griffin to take on a fully grown common welsh green dragon, but you did. What we thought even stranger was that Charlemagne’s form didn’t give you a second glance, even sharing its kill with you. You actually ate some of the dragon which was completely out of character for a griffin. After discussing it with Running Fox, it was decided that your totem would come from both the ferret and the dragon.” Hermione’s eyes were as wide as saucers as she tried to assimilate this information. She turned her head to look toward Harry, who was also shocked. “By the way, your identifying characteristic is the feathers on the top of your head seem to bush out like your hair.”

“Hold on,” Harry said in a nervous-sounding tone. Neville frankly could not blame him, for there were very few things that thought dragons were natural prey, and none of them were very pleasant in thought. “If I went after a dragon as natural prey, then what the bloody hell am I?” It was a testament of Hermione’s shock that she never even chided him for his language, especially to their superior.

Jason on the other hand couldn’t hold in a nervously mirthful chuckle as he motioned toward the pile of dragon meat in front of them. “You are a winged wolf, Charlemagne.” Harry wore a very perplexed look on his face, one that caused Jason to actually break out laughing for a few moments. His laughing fit was encouraged even more by the looks everyone else wore, it was as if they were all simultaneously smacked in the back of their heads with boards. After a few moments the head of the Department of Mysteries got himself under control and explained. “Winged wolves are exceedingly rare creatures, being a variation of the Dire Wolf. And no, they’re not as extinct as the muggles think they are, but they’re not common either. Dire wolves

natural prey are actually graphorns. Their teeth are saber-like, much like the saber-tooth tiger and the cave bear, and like the cave bear they have retractable diamond-hard claws that can tear through just about anything. Unlike cave bears they are exclusively carnivorous. The winged wolf is the alpha of the dire wolf pack. Any dire wolf, or even werewolves and regular wolves, will automatically be subservient to a winged wolf. Their wings, unlike any other flying creature, are very strong and hard to break. The only difference in your look versus a normal winged wolf is the glasses markings around your eyes. Their feathers resemble a cross between fur and actual feathers, and like their fur, is as hard as cobalt steel. Winged wolves are very territorial and protective of their packs. Dire wolves are the only thing graphorns fear, and winged wolves can strike fear into just about any dragon as well, for in the absence of graphorns winged wolves will hunt and kill dragons. Winged wolves are also somewhat resistant to fire, and very resistant to poisons. A nundu's breath won't necessarily kill a winged wolf, you're that resistant. They're also fiercely intelligent."

Jason paused for a moment to let the last two team members absorb what they have learned before he continued. "Each one of you showed to some degree a sign of recognition to the others of your team. It is Running Fox's personal opinion that this is what kept Charlemagne from turning on Phoebe after the dragon was killed. He also has told me that this recognition could be the reason Pheobe went after the dragon in the first place, though he's not really sure about that. If that theory is correct, this means you will all assume mastery over your forms very quickly, probably closer to the three week mark instead of the three month time frame. In fact, he feels you all are okay to train yourselves under minimal observation here instead of the more aggressive observation we had originally planned. The elder Potters have been warned not to allow the younger ones near this forest unless it's a full moon night." Neville was shocked at this, as it was clear Jason was talking about the Marauders. Harry and his friends all knew about the forms of their hosts, but as far as they knew no one else even knew the Marauders were animagi to begin with. Not to mention the fact that the Marauders were illegal animagi. Both Neville and Harry showed their shock, which caused Jason's next response. "Yes, I am aware that James Potter and Sirius Black are illegal animagi, but that's really none of our business,

so neither I nor anyone else in the Department is going to take official notice. We are even aware of the reason behind this, and as a result I would heartily recommend you avoid going into the forest on the night of the full moon, at least this month. Get yourselves under control before confronting that pack, please.”

Neville couldn't help but to think of Remus's reaction to Harry's animagus form. That would be hilarious to watch, since Jason had already said that any werewolf would be subservient to the winged wolf. The ultimate alpha would be hard to ignore for any canine breed. As this thought surfaced Neville could not help but to laugh. When everyone looked at him he said one word, “Sirius.” Harry took only a couple of seconds to get the joke, and then laughed loudly as well, though his laughter was tinged with a little sadness.

The head unspeakable even got the joke, though he only smiled a little before setting them to work making their totems. They spent the rest of the day involved in making and spelling these small carved and decorated packets. After they were done Harry asked the unspeakables to make vests out of the dragon hide and sell the rest. He would take his team to Gringotts the next day and set up accounts under their fake names for the deposits of their pay and their equal shares of the sale price of the dragon body. After a brief argument over why Harry was splitting the money up, the arrangements were finalized. Finally the rest of the Unspeakables left, leaving the group to talk amongst themselves. Of course their primary discussion revolved around what their animagus names would be, and by the end of the night it was all decided. Neville and the rest of them apparated back to the manor, very much satisfied with his name of Ursa.

Potter Manor

Wales

August 30, 1975

Harry's POV

The past few weeks had been hard on his team. They spent every day working on something different. Occlumency lessons and animagus lessons became absolutely vital as they learned to control both their minds and their bodies. Each of them received some kind

of therapy, even if it was simply to counter-act the wounds that a war would leave on a soul. Ginny of course received more intense therapy, something Harry thought was long overdue considering her first year. Ron and Neville both were watching her like a hawk, often ensuring she had exactly what she needed. Her therapy sessions left her raw and in varying emotional moods, so the two young men gave her space if she needed it, support when she needed it, and love at all times. Ron himself was getting over his jealousy and inferiority issues, and was slowly becoming more demonstrative of his feelings as time went on. And since he was the only one of the six who didn't have a girlfriend (at least one immediately available, if Harry was reading things right) he transferred his steps toward healing toward Ginny. He had told Harry one time when they were alone that he blamed himself for her first year, and had sworn to help her any way he could. Harry quickly told him he wasn't to blame, but so far the young man would not believe it. Oh well, that would be something for his therapy to work out.

Harry himself didn't quite know what to tell Ron about his guilt feelings, because he had his own issues there. The therapy sessions were often long and involved and sometimes they didn't seem to help. There were times he felt so frustrated, so alone, that he wondered why he was even getting help to begin with. His grandfather assured him these feelings were normal, that the abuse he had endured for over a decade would not fade away overnight. In fact, the one time Harry had stood up angrily and told the older man he felt these sessions were going no-where, the response he got quite frankly shocked him.

----Flashback----

Harry had just finished describing the fireplace poker incident. He was curled up on the couch, shivering with so many emotions that he felt he would never be able to sort them out. But one emotion blazed hotter than the rest: anger. He barely registered anything that was happening in the room as he envisioned his uncle stating that Harry was faking, and that because he was so ungrateful he could just stay in the cupboard until he showed a proper attitude. He felt himself slipping until the voice of his counselor shook him out of it.

“Harry, what are you feeling right now?” The man, his grandfather, had him in a sealed room with warm walls and few things he could hurt himself with. No one could eavesdrop in here, and the only recording device was the old man’s memories, which he could view later with a pensieve.

Of course, this did nothing to mollify Harry in his frame of mind, especially since his feelings and his mouth seemed connected with no filters. “How do you think it makes me feel? I hate them. I wish they’d die, or better yet, were never born. Hell, I’d do it myself if I could get away with it. But at the same time I know that’s wrong. They may hate me, but they’re my only living family in my own time. I should love them. I could have, if only they loved me. But they won’t, they don’t, and they’ll never see me as anything but a freak, something only fit to be their slave and bloody punching bag.” Harry went on and on like this for some time before frustration built up to an exploding point. Finally he screamed out his frustration while grabbing his hair and nearly pulling it out. “What’s the point?! Why are we even doing this? It doesn’t get me anywhere, all this is doing is making me hate them and myself. That’s it, I need to go.”

Before Harry could leave Charles grabbed him by the shoulders and looked him in the eyes. “That’s your flight response Harry. That’s why we’re doing this, to stop that response.”

“I am not a coward,” Harry ground out while his green eyes slowly started to burn.

“I’m not saying you are, Harry. From what you’ve told me you’re one of the bravest people I know. But there’s one thing you have not faced yet: yourself. And just because you don’t want to face it, whether or not it is out of fear, does not make you a coward. It makes you human. Facing these things is both scary and difficult. No one can face their true selves and not be at least nervous and unsure, even if they had a normal, loving life. And we both know that’s far away from what you did have. I wish things could have been different Harry. I wish I could have been there to keep you from those people, but apparently I wasn’t. I don’t know why, and I don’t want to know. But know that I’ll do anything I can to ensure that once you are able to

win yourself free, you have all the tools you'll need. Part of that begins here, Harry. You need to face yourself, you need to feel what you are feeling. You need to face it head on and work through it, or you're not going to be able to do what you need to do." Charles kept his hand on his grandson's shoulders the entire time so he could keep his eyes looking into the younger man's.

Harry could see the support in the older man's eyes as well as the love. It stopped him cold and caused his body to shiver from the emotions he was trying to keep in. "Why? What are we hoping to accomplish by doing this? I shouldn't have these feelings, I should be more forgiving. . . " Harry couldn't help but to blush in embarrassment.

"You're wrong Harry, you should," Charles corrected as he led the younger man back down. "Every child wants acceptance and love. After your parents died you were denied that for a decade, and even when you went to Hogwarts and found some acceptance, it came at a price. Even there you weren't truly safe. You were still abused, if not physically than emotionally, and nothing was done to stop it. Anyone would feel betrayed, hurt, and angry with that kind of upbringing. That you're still able to love, care, and feel joy is something that astounds me. As to why we're doing this, there's a couple of reasons. First, you need to be aware of these feelings you have. If you don't know they exist, you can't face them, and eventually it will build up and explode, harming yourself and others around you. Hiding them away does not help. Constructively releasing them does. Second, it helps break the controls placed upon you by others Harry. If someone knows that all they have to do is wind you up in anger, righteous or otherwise, and you'll go charging into something, they can use that against you. That's not something you want. You need to experience your feelings, confront them, and decide what to do with them. That's the only healthy way to do it. But don't let yourself think this is easy, Harry. It's not. It takes time, patience, and understanding. It's not done overnight, or over a few nights. And it may not seem at first like it's helping, but the foundations must be laid first. It can and will be done Harry. I believe in you, and more importantly, both Hermione and Luna do as well."

—End Flashback—

Until that point he knew in his head they loved him, that they cared for him, and that to a certain extent they believed in him. Fight Voldemort? Sure no problem. Fighting his inner demons was another story entirely, one he wasn't sure himself he could do. Until that point, he wasn't sure Luna or Hermione had faith he could do it either. Now he knew that it was childish of him to think that way though, something they themselves confirmed the night after that conversation. They had put it in no uncertain terms that they believed in him, no matter what he was doing. He knew they'd stand by him (he couldn't make them go away even if he wanted them to), but he didn't quite understand the depth of their feelings. Hermione's fight against the bonds had made him a bit uncertain of her feelings, but she quickly disabused him of that belief as she looked in his eyes and told him she believed in him.

Harry had to give the world credit, no matter if it was the magical world or the non-magical, it had a way of really screwing things up with its prejudices. In the muggle world, anything not normal was branded as "abnormal" and looked down upon by the majority. He knew it shouldn't matter who you love, or who you call family. But in the muggle world that was not the case. And that was the base for Hermione's entire problem. A three-way relationship like theirs was about as abnormal as you could get, combining homosexuality and polyamory all in one package. Hermione was brought up on these values, as was Harry to a certain extent. But where Harry's upbringing caused him to question the validity of everything the Dursleys taught him, Hermione never had a reason to question anything her family or their religious leaders said. Her until-recently held belief that authority figures always knew best and could never be questioned was testament to that fact. But these last few months with all that Dumbledore was pulling caused her to re-think that. And their bond gave her impetus to do what Harry hoped she would with all his being: rethink her stand on relationships and accept theirs completely.

Today though the Ministry Six would be concentrating on something else: the final preparations for returning to school. They were fully admitted, per the board of governors. Their O.W.L.'s assured they'd all be in the same year, and thanks to the Potters, as well as their pay as Unspeakables, they didn't have to worry about funds. So today

they would meet with the Headmaster and his assistant for the sorting. The governors, surprisingly enough along with the Headmaster, had decided to spare the six of them from being sorted alongside the first years. There would still be an announcement made about them at the end of starting feast, but that would be the extent of their public declaration at school.

Thus everyone was gathered in the sitting room, including the full contingent of the Marauders. Harry had to keep himself under an iron-like control to avoid killing Pettigrew, and even then it became readily apparent to everyone that the rat had rubbed at least the original trio the wrong way. If it wasn't for Luna's calming thoughts in his head, he would have snapped a while ago. A thought well echoed by Hermione's part of the bond.

‘Just don't look at him unless you have to, and you'll be okay,’ he heard Luna's soothing voice echo through his head. The feeling of concerned love from her was heady, and something he was still trying to get used to. He could feel Hermione's thoughts echo his own, and yet she was still supporting him as much as she could. He turned his head to the side to smile at her in return, which she returned with a small one of her own. As long as he had both of their support, he'd make it through today.

Harry's thoughts were soon short circuited however by the opening of the door to reveal not only the elder Potters, but Dumbledore and an older looking gentleman as well. Harry took a close look at the old man and decided he hadn't aged a day from this time to their time. For now his companion was forgotten as he made a conscious effort to appear curious but leery. It wouldn't do for his cover to be blown by the feelings he had inside, after all. “Halstead,” Charles called to divert Harry's attention, “This is Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts and Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot. The man holding the old hat is Olliver Standish, Arithmancy instructor and Deputy Headmaster under Professor Dumbledore.”

Harry reached out his hand, making sure to be just tentative enough to keep the fiction of their identities intact. In reality, he didn't want to be within five feet of Dumbledore, especially close enough to look the

old man in the eyes. "Hello Professor," Harry said quietly. "These are my close friends, Haleigh Joyce Galway and Lilith Leedham. Over there are our close friends Ryan Bartholomew and Gwyneth Melynda Whitcomb and Nathan Lambeth. I am of course Halstead Jeremiah Penwell, at your service." Harry bowed slightly over the clasped hands in classic greeting form, then let go of the Headmaster's hand to take a step back. "I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for allowing us in your school."

Albus spent about a minute looking everyone over, paying close attention to the person speaking. He seemed contemplative of their leader especially after he announced his full name, almost to the point of excluding the others. "Think nothing of it, Mr. Penwell. It is a sad thing when tragedy strikes one family, much less an entire town. Have you had any problems finding a guardian? Most of you have at least another year before you reach your majorities, after all."

Harry could have sworn he saw a very hungry but brief expression fly across the old man's face, but it vanished so quickly that Harry had to move on. "No sir. Mr. Potter has put us under his house's protection and guidance, and the Ministry has deemed that to be enough to allow for all of our emancipations. We'll spend our next two summers here, as well as at least a portion of Christmas holidays."

Albus Dumbledore's face took on a look of grave concern that had Harry admiring his acting abilities at this news. He glanced briefly over to Charles before answering that response, "While normally that would be perfectly fine, I do have some reservations in this case. The people suspected of destroying Ravenshire are a particularly vindictive group, who do not like to leave loose ends. Your staying here could endanger this family, young Mr. Penwell. And while the wards here are excellent, Hogwarts wards have yet to be overcome. It may be safer for you to remain there."

'Not on your life, old man. Especially not on Harry's' Hermione's rather harsh thought came through their bond. Harry had to agree with the sentiment whole heartedly. In fact, he didn't have to look around the room to figure out that the rest of the group fully supported it, even if they were schooling their faces to be polite and not to arouse suspicion. Finally Harry shook his head and smiled back to

the old manipulator. "Sir, while I definitely appreciate the offer, at this time I must respectfully decline it. Yes, Hogwarts wards may not have an equal, but at the same time I am reminded of an old saying concerning terrorists, "If you allow them to make you hide, they have already won." We all have discussed our options before accepting Lord Potter's and as a group decided it would be in our best interests to remain here at Potter Manor. We can and will take proper precautions when going out, but we must be able to live our lives."

Before Dumbledore could say any more Charles cleared his throat and stepped forward. "Lord Dumbledore, these young people have refused your assistance in this matter. They are fully aware of the dangers to them and have already made their decisions. It is no problem for us to take them in, and this manor is the most protected place in Britain short of Hogwarts itself. I am sure this place is safe enough, wouldn't you agree?"

Even Dumbledore could recognize this was a lost cause for the moment and decided to move along by changing the subject. "I am sorry if I appeared over-zealous. I merely wish to protect the younger generation, especially those targeted by the bad influences of this world. Mr. Standish, would you bring the hat forward so we can get this underway?" As he said this he conjured a wooden stool at the front of the room so everyone could face them as they were sorted. "Miss Galway, if you will?"

Hermione stepped forward and sat down nervously. Harry could entirely sympathize, as not only was the sorting process nerve racking enough, but add to this the very fact they were time travelers and the situation could become very much worse. Harry sent feelings of support and love through their bond, which surprisingly enough allowed him to get the gist of the entire conversation.

Hermione's POV

'Haleigh Joyce Galway is it? I don't think so,' the Sorting Hat echoed in her head. This scared Hermione as she envisioned her worst fears come to life. 'Oh no, my Lady, I would not worry about your secret getting out as long as you truly do not wish it to. I am

bound to Hogwarts and the Founders Heirs, not the Headmaster or anyone else. I can see you wish for your true identity to remain safe, so it will be.'

'What about the others? Will you keep their secrets?' Hermione asked as she sensed both Harry's support and truthfulness from the hat.

'Of course my Lady. I have centuries in keeping secrets, even from the various Headmasters of Hogwarts. If that is what you wish, I will of course comply.'

'Okay, I'm assuming you don't need me to lower my Occlumency shields, but why are you calling me 'my Lady?'"She could feel Harry's questioning that as well.

'You mean besides the soul bond you share with the Heir of Gryffindor?' the hat responded with slightly amused sarcasm, 'You're right, there is another reason which I cannot divulge right now. You will learn in time, my Lady, as things become more clear. In the meantime, I can give you a hint, if you so prefer?' Hermione was a first feeling dejected over the hat's refusal, but perked up at the offer of a hint and all but nodded furiously for an affirmative response. 'Very well, my Lady. Look to your new house, and you will find what you seek. So for now, you're best in . . . ' "RAVENCLAW"

Hermione felt uncertain about this, but knew enough to take the hat off and step away from the stool before handing the hat back to Mr. Standish. Quickly she walked over to Harry and took his hand, grateful for the assurances that everything would turn out fine. Then Dumbledore called for Neville, and she watched as he sat down and the hat went on his head.

Neville's POV

Neville tensed up as soon as the hat was placed on his head. He spent the last few minutes bringing all of his Occlumency shields up to full power, only to hear the hat's voice in his head again. 'Occlumency does not work against me, Mr. Lambeth. I know that's not your real name just as I know this is not your real time. But you do

not need to worry, for Godric ensured anything I would learn would be safe from any but them or their heirs, unless permitted by them. And that eventuality has already been covered.'

'Are you sure no one can see what you do?' Neville asked uncertainly.

'Unless someone uses Legilimency while your sorting, then your secrets are safe. Even then, they're not reading me, but you. So keep your shields up, Mr Longbottom, and you'll be fine. At any rate, am I to assume all six of you are from the future?' At Neville's reluctant affirmative the Sorting Hat continued, 'Good, that will make things somewhat easier, save apparently none of you know who you really are. Hmm... I tell you what young man, I'll give you the same hint I gave young Miss Granger, look to your new house to find your past, and your future. In the meantime, I'm sure you'll find things interesting in . . . ' "HUFFLEPUFF!"

Neville stood up and bowed Mr. Standish as he handed the hat back over. He then clasped his hand on Harry's shoulder and warned him to make sure that Luna had her occlumency shields up before the hat was placed upon her head.

Luna's POV

Luna smiled at Harry's unspoken warning, winked at him, and then skipped over to the stool before her name was called. She so enjoyed making people wonder about her sometimes, especially when it was people like the Headmaster. She didn't like him or trust him, regardless of what common wisdom dictated. After all, he never stood once to help her, which gave her his measure long ago. And, having been given the reassurance from Hermione that their privacy would be upheld, she had no problems with the Sorting hat reading her.

'I'm glad to hear that,' the hat responded as he was reading her, 'Though I must say I regret the pain my choice will cause you in my future.'

‘It’s okay, Mr. Hat. I would have had that no matter where you put me. At least this way I managed to find the other parts of me. I may not have had I been sorted into their house.’ And for that she was truly grateful. She felt a concerted effort from outside to penetrate her mind, so she put up visions of her fairy friends to keep her safe. Even so, she had to inwardly wince as the probe redoubled.

‘My my, the Headmaster grows rather insistent, doesn’t he? Well my Lady, it has been a while since I last sorted a Seeress. I can see where I put you before and why . . .’ He stopped there as the probe redoubled again and he was forced to take some of the pain himself to keep the person he was sorting from passing out. ‘My Lady, why don’t you call upon your familiar? He will put a stop to this, and at the same time discourage him from doing this to anyone else.’

Luna wasn’t too concerned for herself, though she was beginning to show signs of strain , but to have this happen to Harry was one thing she was not willing to allow. So even though she didn’t think she had a familiar, she was willing to give it a try anyway as she mentally called out to it.

Just then a loud crash like a cabinet full of crystal breaking on the floor resounded throughout the house. At the same time the inherent magical energy in the room seemed to ripple from a point about a foot in front of Luna, strong enough to rock everyone back. Once everyone caught themselves and looked toward the young woman they saw an unusual sight. There in front of them was something that resembled an earthy brown furred rabbit with a white tail. It was the size of a border collie and had two spiraling horns protruding from its head. It’s front teeth were long like a rabbit’s, though its front feet had what appeared to be opposable thumbs and were made for grasping things. Underneath of it a small hill of dirt slowly started to fade away as it hunched there facing Dumbledore, it’s posture protective.

Immediately the presence on Luna’s mind eased as the Headmaster rocked back as if struck by a blow to his forehead. He didn’t say anything, though the rest of the room seemed to glare at him. This allowed the sorting to continue with Luna humming happily.

‘There see, all better now. Though your Lord is worried about you. Last time I said you could do well in one of two different houses, and the one I chose caused you all manner of problems. This time I think I’ll put you in a different house, and I can guarantee you won’t be alone. But please assure Miss Granger that my choices was not to separate you three, for I know you won’t let the politics even make you hide publicly. Instead, you’ll be safest in . . .”GRYFFINDOR”

Luna fairly rocketed off of the stool and handed Mr. Standish the hat, and quickly made her way toward the creature on the floor that everyone was curious about. She at first ignored the questions as to what the rabbit-like creature was as she made sure it was okay. Finally assured of its health and of its intent to stay, she stood up and guided it back to where her mates were sitting. “Everyone, meet Nemus. He’s a Crumple Horned Snorkack.” She rather enjoyed the next few minutes of gawking and interest in her new familiar, the highlight of which was a rather lengthy mental apology from Hermione with a promise to believe her in the future.

Finally Dumbledore cleared his throat and forced himself to continue on as he called Harry forward. Harry stood up and glared at the old man before advancing.

Harry’s POV

He turned around to sit, but before he did he looked at the old man and said, “I would hope that the conversations between us and the Sorting Hat are kept secret sir. I don’t think anyone likes their private thoughts invaded. I would not care to think what would happen if the trust in the Sorting Hat’s confidentiality were broken.” With this Harry sat down and allowed the hat to be put on his head, still keeping his Occlumency shields on full. He made a conscious effort to calm down, for it was not the Sorting Hat’s fault Dumbledore attempted what he did.

‘My apologies young Lord Potter. Though I must say I am glad you at least suspect who you truly are. As I told your Lady, your wishes to keep these conversations secret are my commands. I can see where

I thought you would do good in Slytherin, but right now I must ask if you wish to continue where you were?’

Harry thought about this for a moment, and then remembered what he told Luna. ‘Yes, I think that will be best. I don’t want Luna to be alone amongst the students. Is there anything I should know?’

The Sorting Hat thought for a few seconds before answering that question, ‘Only that you need to remember the lessons of your past. Trust those with you and those you can verify, and work toward the foundations of house unity now. You and I know that it won’t see fruition until you go back to your time, but the school seeing the example of you and your friends will inspire some of them without changing the time lines more than necessary. In the meantime, good luck in . . . “GRYFFINDOR”

As Harry stepped down from the stool and handed the hat back, he thought about what the hat had said. He watched as Ron and Ginny were both sorted into Slytherin, which confirmed his thoughts. He sent his thoughts toward Hermione and Luna, asking for confirmation. The jury was still out where they were concerned, but they would think upon it very carefully in the future. In the meantime they spent a little more time talking to the faculty while doing their best to remain respectful. Finally the professors left and Harry turned toward his group. “Okay everyone, we’ve got plans to make and packing to do. Let’s get to work.” He then waved to the Marauders before taking off for his room where the others would congregate soon enough. There they would plan what to do while at Hogwarts and beyond before finally going to bed.

Chapter 7: Train Rides and Other Dangers

Platform 9 3/4

King's Cross

London, England

August 31, 1975

Harry's POV

Harry was reminded of his first trip to Hogwarts as he passed through the barrier onto the train platform, which made it easier for him to act like it was his first time boarding the train. He was aware traditionally the train left September the first, but for reasons that were only vaguely stated the Express was leaving a day early. Not that he or his team got any official notification of this. Instead he found out from the Marauders who had received their notifications three days ago. Soon it was apparent the team was not going to receive any letters, which started an earnest debate not only between the members of Team Gamma but between the elder Potters and the Marauders about what was going on. It was finally decided they were better off not letting on that they suspected anything. Instead they'd show up a day earlier than the old man expected them, thus hopefully avoiding whatever potential traps could be set up for them. Thus they were all present with the rest of the students, and dutifully pretending it was their first time boarding the train. James had sent Sirius, Remus and Peter ahead to claim a compartment while he showed them around. Harry himself felt a little guilty lying to his father about his knowledge, but it was necessary. This guilt led him to watch his father instead of looking around the platform while they were given their tour.

‘Harry, you need to act a little more awed. You’re attracting a little too much attention from James,’ Luna’s voice advised in his head. Harry blinked and noticed the odd look the Head Marauder was giving him and stammered off an apology, feigning nervousness. Since this was close enough to the truth, and one of the standard reactions from first years, the excuse was readily accepted. Harry then started looking around while hiding a blush that anyone not in Team Gamma would have thought to be from embarrassment. Those that knew him well knew it was more a slight shame from being caught staring at the younger man. This happened from time to time, though this was the first time his father actually caught him. Harry had

never known too much about his father, even though it was well known in his time he always wanted to know more. So now Harry had the chance to watch both of his parents grow up and become parents. Only one problem, right now they were mostly Ginny's age. Harry wasn't sure what to think about that really. They had traveled far enough back in time that James and the rest of the Marauders were in their fifth year while they were in their sixth. Fortunately none of them had prefect status here, so they would not be responsible for disciplining their own parents.

If Harry were completely honest with himself, he found that thought both a blessing and a curse. One of the only memories he had of James and the rest was from Snape's pensieve; the event that was to occur later this year still weighed on his mind a little. Harry and the others had watched the Marauders while they were at Potter Manor, and often sat back to discuss what they saw. So far, with only a limited amount of evidence which was admittedly gathered when they were on their better behaviors, the fifth years weren't as bad as the memory suggested. Harry had indeed shown them the memories as part of their intelligence gathering, which had caused nearly all of them to look askance at James for a little while. Only Hermione voiced an opposing opinion, even though they expected her to be of the same mind as Harry. She had argued, with some success, that this evidence was definitely biased as it came from James's main childhood rival. The hatred Snape had toward James was the stuff of legends, thus even if it were a pensieve memory it was not fully reliable. While pensieve memories were impossible to fake without it being obvious, it said nothing of what happened before or any other factors. Harry was not totally convinced, but had to admit that she had a point. Harry himself was one of the first to believe the worst of Malfoy for example, so Hermione's defense could very well be accurate. In the end they had stated they would watch and see this year. Harry found himself both wanting to stop that event for his own future's sake and leaving it alone. On one hand he could avoid a lot of pain for himself, but on the other hand it could mess things up. In the end they'd have to leave it alone, he well knew. But it didn't make things easier.

Harry's musings were broken by a shout from their guide. Harry snapped his eyes toward the man in time to see him saunter toward a

group of young women congregating a car down from where they were. As the group came closer, Harry's eyes locked upon the woman in the middle. His heart actually skipped a beat at the vision before him: his mother. She was every bit as beautiful as his photo album showed, though it appeared she had just a little more growing to do. He noticed she looked both happy and unhappy to see James, as an amused smile flashed on her lips before being replaced by irritation.

"Oy, Evans!" James shouted as he walked toward the woman. "Good to see you back." Harry cringed at this greeting even as he felt the sympathetic annoyance from his two mates. Harry may not have too much experience with the opposite sex, but even he knew you didn't address the woman you wanted to be with by their last name while greeting them like this.

"And I can see you're back as well, unfortunately," Lily responded with a slight scowl on her face. Her friends started to giggle at this as they took a step back. Harry could tell they chose to be an audience to the beginning of the annual Potter-Evans mating dance. Harry himself decided to play the ignorant and unfamiliar guest and follow along behind James. The rest assumed their roles and followed.

James put his hand over his heart as if he were stabbed there and faked a step back almost into Harry. "Ouch. You wound me Evans. But you know you are actually glad I'm around. Your life is more interesting with me in it. Go on, admit it." James tried to give her a nice-guy smile that was rather ruined by his cocky attitude.

"Yeah, I'm glad you're here," she began in a seductive voice that sounded so much like a set up to Harry he had to smile, "That way I can make sure you're not luring some poor unsuspecting fourth year into something they'll regret." The young women laughed at this as she fired the zinger off James's starboard bow. Even Harry couldn't help but to laugh at that, which broke him out of his almost hypnotized state. This attracted Lily's attention toward him, and by extension his friends. "Hoodwinked some new people into doing your dirty work James? Where's Black, Remus and Pettigrew?"

“Inside trying to find a compartment for us,” James answered a little bit. It was fortunate that James had missed the look on Harry’s face prior to this, as it made the introductions a bit easier. “They’re actually friends of the family that my Dad extended familial protection over. The two with light brown hair are Ryan and Gwyneth Whitcomb and the darker haired stocky young man is Nathan Lambeth,” he explained as he motioned toward them. “And last but not least is this young trio. The young man with longer light brown hair is Halstead Penwell. He’s accompanied by his girlfriends Haleigh Galway and Lilith Leedham. Haleigh is the one with red hair.”

Harry smiled and stepped forward at the introduction taking the hand offered by Lily in his hand and bowing over it. “And who is this rather attractive young woman?” he asked with as charming a smile as he could manage.

James seemed a little put off by this display as he answered, “This is Lily Evans from Gryphendor house,” he said a little bit sullenly. Clearly James did not like the way Harry was acting.

Of course this behavior was guaranteed to put Lily off, so the woman apparently decided to play along with an obvious pure-blood greeting and blush a little. “As he said, I’m Lily Evans. These are my friends: Alice, Janice, Gabriel, and Jessica. It is a pleasure to meet such a well-mannered gentleman.” As she removed her hand, she looked toward the group behind Harry and James and asked one of the more obvious questions, “Was Potter being truthful when he mentioned girlfriends? Or was the plural part of some part of his . . . imagination?”

Luna came forward and chuckled as she offered her hand to Lily, “Lilith Leedham, one of Halstead’s girlfriends. It’s true that Haleigh and I are both his girlfriends in many of the ways James meant. I know it’s unusual, but it works for us. Why fix what isn’t broken?” With this the gallery of young women erupted in knowing smiles with Alice voicing a loud agreement. It was obvious to everyone that it was a willing triangle, which let the young women accept it easier. Hermione blushed a little bit as she came forward and nodded in agreement while pressing closer to Harry in slight shyness.

Lily took a moment to look a little closer at the sextet before nodding in agreement. "Well if it works for you, then no-one has a right to say anything about it." Harry let go of a breath he hadn't known he was holding. It meant a lot from him to hear that acceptance for reasons he was both sure and unsure of. But at least his own mother didn't disapprove of this. He could feel a part of himself relax now at the same time he felt a tiny part of Hermione's resistance taper off. Harry simply tightened his grip on Hermione's hand for a moment and smiled at her. He sent a wave of comfort and support toward her, which he could tell was amplified by Luna. "Is something wrong?" he heard Lily ask. Apparently she caught some visual sign of their relief.

"No, not really," Harry answered as a slight blush filled his cheeks. "It's more that this relationship is a recent development. While we're all committed to each other, we still have some adjusting to do. It is a new relationship, and an odd one at that. So there's naturally going to be some obstacles to overcome." He smiled widely as Lily gave a wide approving smile and continued, "But that's all part of any relationship, so I know we'll get through it."

"Yeah, but be aware it will take some time," James decided to pop in, "After all, Evans still has yet to accept we're meant to be, and I've been asking her to go out with me for ages." Harry could feel Hermione wince at the same time he did, followed by an irritated huff.

"I wouldn't go out with someone with an ego as overinflated as yours if my life depended on it Potter. So grow up and accept that fact." With that Lily turned around and headed off in a huff. After some disapproving sniffs from her friends, they disappeared as well.

"James," Ron spoke up with a deep exasperated sigh, "I may only have the emotional range of a teaspoon, but even I can tell you don't assume someone is yours like that. I hate to say it mate, but you just lost ground there." Harry could feel Hermione's shock at this statement, but before she could respond the train's whistle blew followed by Sirius sticking his head out of a window and waving at them from further down the train. "Think about it mate. In the meantime the train's about to go. We should get aboard." With this Harry agreed vehemently and started to rush everyone aboard. 'You

can corner Ron later Hermione,' he sent to the smartest witch as they boarded the train.

It took them a few moments to find the rest of the Marauders, but when they did another problem appeared. None of the compartments were big enough to support all 10 people, yet Charles had left explicit instructions that the two groups were not to be separated until they arrived at Hogwarts. There was a little initial grouching from Sirius and Peter over this, but Charles had held firm and explained this was a family affair that had to be met. A good half-hour lecture on familial duties had left both boys almost begging to stay with the time-travelers. Thus they were not going to separate even if lives were on the line. Remus and Hermione started to debate what to do when Harry took out his wand and muttered a few words, followed by two more spells.

"Ha . . . Halstead! You'll imbalance the train!" Hermione exclaimed in a slightly panicked voice.

Harry laughed and shook his head, "Relax Haleigh. I added both a conforming charm and a stabilizing charm to the compartment. There's no way this compartment will throw things off." Hermione looked like her lower jaw was about to fall through the floor as she ran through the implications of the mental list Harry was thinking of. Some of those had to be done wandlessly to get them done as quickly as they were. This only caused Harry to laugh more as he reached over to kiss her lips.

"Oi! Get a room!" Ron and Sirius both exclaimed at once.

"Don't we already have one?" Luna shot back innocently right afterward. This caused Neville, Ginny, and Peter to break out in laughter while the rest started to set their trunks up in the racks. Luna herself reached out and grabbed the two kissing people to pull them into the room. As the door closed behind them she leaned in and gave them both a brief butterfly kiss on their joined lips while rubbing their arms. "Come up for air sometime soon," she whispered attractively before skipping away.

Harry could feel Hermione jump ever-so-slightly at the kiss, for it was something she still wasn't fully used to. Harry considered it very fortunate that not only was Luna not easily insulted but that she was very understanding of Hermione's predicament. He ended the kiss to see Hermione flush a little in embarrassment before she whispered an apology toward Luna. They then sat down in time to see the train start to move and leave the station. At first the compartment was quiet as both Marauders and time-travelers found themselves not able to discuss anything they normally would have. Of course the tension between the original Golden Trio and certain parts of the Marauders didn't help matters.

While the rest of Team Gamma seemed to be rather blasé when it came to Pettigrew, Ron, Hermione, and Harry could not seem to shake their animosity toward the future traitor. This was shown in a variety of ways, both hot and cold. At first Peter was almost pointedly ignored by the three which caused some rather awkward and embarrassing moments with James. Finally Luna and Ginny stepped in, with Ginny taking James aside while Luna handled the Trio. After that discussion Harry made a promise to himself never to disappoint Luna that badly again. It felt as if he were in the bottom of a deep pit by the time she was done discussing things with them. Hermione was nearly in tears and Harry was ashamed. Finally they promised Luna they'd work to treat him civilly. As they were the first to cave in they had to help convince Ron, which took some time. The result was a cool truce between them and the rat. None of them would ever feel comfortable around each other, and they would try to avoid Peter as much as possible when they weren't with the Marauders, being as polite as possible any other time. Harry knew a problem would eventually arise because of this, but he would have to take things as they came.

The train soon built up speed as the ten teenagers started to settle down to conversations and games. Ron and Remus started a game of Chess while Luna, Sirius, Ginny, and Hermione started a game of exploding snap with Peter cheering them on. Harry sat in silence looking out the window as Sirius and James started to talk quietly. Most of the trip passed rather quietly with Ron each splitting two wins apiece before Ron joined the exploding snap game while Remus and Hermione started talking over arithmancy. Finally Harry noticed the

day had passed on into early evening. Given what Charles told him and his prior experiences he guessed they were about an hour out of Hogsmeade. Standing up, he cleared his throat and announced, "If I'm reading things right, Hogsmeade in about an hour. Guys, we need to go get our robes on before the rush. Except for Remus of course, since he's already dressed," he said, wagging his eyebrows up and down.

"Oh by all means, he can stay here and see what you boys won't see for a while," Hermione responded with a sly smile of her own.

"Er . . . I meant that he didn't need to change, but he still had to leave?" Harry paled at Hermione's suggestion and spoke before realizing that she was teasing him.

"Just what I thought you'd say." Hermione then shoved a set of school robes in his hands before shoving Harry out of the door with the rest of the boys. Soon they found their way to some bathrooms while Remus stood outside the compartment as a guard.

A short while later they all returned to the compartment. The women were just putting the finishing touches on each other's hair as they entered. "Your hair looks great, both of you," Harry commented lovingly before lightly caressing each pair of lips with his own. No sooner did he finish giving Luna a kiss as the door to their compartment was forcefully pushed open revealing Severus Snape and Theodore Nott Sr. Whatever they were expecting they obviously were not prepared to see six wands drawn and pointed at them. Automatic reflexes had spurred Harry to react so he was closest to the door but out of the way of spellfire from further within. "What do you want?" Harry asked a bit coldly, ignoring the surprised objection from Hermione in his mind.

"I had thought I saw a couple of Slytherins here," Severus sneered back. "I'm here to rescue them from the clutches of you Gryffindors."

Harry personally thought Severus sounded as snide and foul as he did as a teacher, and had to resist the urge to hex the man. "Oh, I'm

sure they don't need saving. Especially since they're currently pointing their wands at you. Wouldn't you say?"

"No, that just means you have them under compulsion. Now lower your wands before I deduct house points."

Harry then noticed a prefect badge on Severus, which was interesting knowledge. With one hand he motioned for the others to lower their wands, though no one put their wands away. Nott had his wand out, and there was not one team member that wanted to be caught flat footed. Before he could say anything else though Remus spoke up, "Nott, lower your wand or I'll deduct house points from you." Harry had to smile at the reminder of geese and ganders.

Once Nott lowered his wand Harry decided to speak up about the accusation. "Now I would hope that you were speaking figuratively right now, unknown Slytherin. I would hate to demand the Headmaster adjudication for unsubstantiated accusations. You have no reason to accuse us of doing anything more than sitting in a magically enlarged compartment. And before you start on about improper use of magic," he interrupted before he could be accused of anything more, "There is nothing that states we cannot do so, provided we are allowed to use magic outside of school and that we restore the compartment to its original state before we exit the train. And seeing as how I am the one who cast the spell, and I'm legally emancipated, and we haven't arrived in Hogsmeade yet, I am well within my rights."

Harry had never seen Severus turn that shade of red before. He found it quite interesting but nothing could match his uncle, so he was unimpressed. "The fact that any Slytherin would willingly sit in a compartment with Gryffindors and pull wands on a Slytherin prefect is proof enough. Now release them at once."

"You wish Snivillus," Sirius mocked in return. "You don't know who these people are, do you? They're new transfers from Ravenshire. So why don't you and your pet dog scamper on back to whatever hole you crawled out of and let us enjoy the rest of our trip in peace?"

Harry could hear a crowd starting to gather outside and hoped this would all end soon. But it seemed like fools would be fools as Severus developed a wide grin on his face. "Oh really?" he asked sarcastically before turning to address Ron and Ginny, "My condolences on your loss, but I'm afraid if they were hanging around the parents of these people I can see why. Why don't you come with me and we'll help you make true friends?"

"What precisely do you mean by that?" Ginny returned in a low but dangerous voice that caused Harry to cringe as she appeared to get angrier and angrier.

"You will find it's not what you know, it's who you know. And when you take a side you suffer the consequences," Severus intimated. "Besides, this young man is obviously related to Potter. So I'd say it's probably a good. . . ."

That was as far as Severus got before finding a wand pressing into his throat and pointed at his brain. Harry himself didn't know he moved until he could see the reflection of his burning green eyes in the Slytherin's own. "Complete that sentence, Snivillus. Give me an excuse to rid this world of your greasy stench." Nott would have helped, but instead he found himself at wandpoint by Hermione and Luna. Harry saw a fear grow in Severus's eyes as the man realized Harry was about to kill him.

"Ten points from Gryffindor for drawing a wand on a prefect. Now let me go."

Harry was not about to fall to such an obviously faked display of bravery. Especially when he was as close to losing his temper as he was. Instead he pushed both Slytherins out into the hall and Severus into the wall behind him. "I'll let you go, for now. But if you ever insult my parents again, I will make you wish you and I never met. And that's not a threat Snivillus, that is an ironclad promise," he growled softly in his ear. Severus paled as he looked into the Gryffindor's eyes, fear leaking into his own. Harry could smell the fear as the pale man's bladder released, and took a step back with a predatory smile on his face. "I'm glad we could come to an understanding Severus."

With this Harry turned and walked back into the compartment, shutting the door behind him.

After the two Slytherins left Harry sighed and looked at his friends. "Sorry about that, some things are rather tender for me." Seeing the Marauders nodding he turned then toward Ron and Ginny. "Sorry, I fear I just made your lives a bit harder in Slytherin."

Ron shrugged in an "it could not be helped" kind of way and was on his way to responding when the door opened suddenly. For the second time in the train trip the team had their wands drawn again and pointed at the doorway. This time the Marauders were reaching for their own as well before James at least froze, immediately followed by Harry. In the doorway stood Lily Evans, and she did not look happy. "Care to explain what you think you were doing?" she asked crossly.

Harry himself could not move or respond. Before him stood his mother, who he had met under better circumstances on the platform. Now he was almost alone and personal with her, and in trouble. He wondered if this is what it would have felt like to have her disciplining him. For just a moment he studied every detail of Lily's face in almost rapturous wonder even as his mind, as well as the voices of Luna and Hermione bid him to answer. Unfortunately he did not move or react until James cleared his throat rather violently. When Harry looked over at his father, he discovered the Marauder was looking at him rather pointedly, with just a little jealousy in his eyes. Harry finally realized what his gaze must have looked like which broke him out of his stupor. "Sorry Ms. . . . ?"

"Evans, Lily Evans. I'm the fifth year female prefect for Gryffindor. Now, why were you holding a Slytherin at wand point in the corridor? Who are the other three with you?"

Harry could feel Luna's wince at the last question, which caused him to shudder as well. And it was not lost on him the similarities between Hermione and Lily just then. So with apparent ease he started to answer her questions. "Reverse order on the questions. These are my friends Ryan and Gwyneth Whitcomb and Nathan Lambeth, Ryan and Gwyneth being the Slytherins while Nathan is the Hufflepuff. The

other two ladies you've already met. And as far as that . . . man, he barged in here and tried to take Ryan and Gwyneth away from here. He received an initial reception to the one you just received, which I apologize for. When we made it clear they did not want to go he accused us of using magic to compel them into staying. Then he insulted their parents and the rest of ours."

James looked at Harry with apparent awe as the older boy (Harry was currently older than his father by a year) in awe. But before James could voice his thoughts Lily responded once again with a nod and her fists on her hips. Harry still could not break the parallels between his love and his mother. "And that gave you the right to resort to threats and violence how?"

Harry sighed and looked down toward the floor, his face slowly turning red in embarrassment. But before he could answer Luna spoke up, "Ms. Evans, please forgive Halstead. You must understand that it's been a long summer for all of us. Mr. Snape came in here in a threatening manner, then insinuated that our friends would meet the same fate as their parents unless they went with them. Rather more than insulting really. I mean the Dark Glandersmashers must have really gotten to him. And considering what we've been through, and the fact we all had to fight for our lives, can you blame us for trying to rid ourselves of such an infestation? Really, if you look at it, Halstead did Mr. Severus a favor."

Lily looked toward the Gryffindor female with a bit of bewilderment, her anger instantly dissipated by Luna's comments. Harry in the meantime resolved to thank her very thoroughly as he could feel the amusement building in Luna. "Dark Glandersmashers?" Lily finally asked.

"Oh, they're very dangerous beings, Ms. Evans. Their presence has been known to spark bullying, hatred and violence. And once you are infested with them it is so very hard to get rid of them. The spell to do so can't be learned by anyone else other than the Light Glanders, who are their mortal enemies. Unfortunately the Dark Glandersmashers tend to drive off anyone who would help the victim find the Light Glanders. And if they can't drive them off then they drive their victims to horrible acts of violence, rape, torture and even

death.” Luna stepped up beside Harry and snaked her arm around his waste before continuing. “Halstead’s actions were a sure fire way to alert a victim to the fact they are indeed victims, so long as they are aware of the Dark Glandersmashers. Do you know if Mr. Severus knows about them?”

Lily was apparently trying to shake the cobwebs from her head for almost a full minute before she answered, “I don’t think so, Ms. Leedham . . . “

Luna to her credit gave the woman an earnest smile of friendship before answering Lily, “Oh well then I think someone should really let him know about them, don’t you? I’ll be happy to get a couple of reference books out of the library and show you what they look like. Unfortunately they tend to be invisible a lot so you have to look for symptoms instead of trying to spot them. You really need a pair of rudimega glasses to see them. Pity really.”

Harry could tell Hermione was trying her best to hold in laughter, and for the most part was succeeding. The others of the team were trying their hardest, though corners of lips were twisting upwards as Hermione spoke, “Lilith, what are the symptoms?”

“Oh . . . let’s see . . . sudden unexplained changes in behavior toward the darker side of things, gradual withdrawal of friends with opposite goals from the Glandersmashers, increases in rude and violent behavior, betrayal of friends and relatives and a sudden decline in good will toward others. Later this can lead into uncontrollable threats of violence and eventual decline into darkness.”

Lily looked like she was torn between shock and complete disbelief. Harry felt sorry for her really, as the first time anyone had the Luna experience it could be rather daunting. She also seemed rather conflicted as to what to believe and what to do. Finally his mother seemed to decide upon a wait and see approach by saying, “Very well then. I’ll let it slide this time. But be aware that violence is not the accepted way to solve disputes at Hogwarts. In the meantime, I should go find Severus and make sure everything is okay.” She then

closed the door slowly and made her way down the corridor in the opposite direction Snape had gone.

After he was sure that Lily had gone he turned his attention toward Luna with a look which was a mixture of disbelief, shock, and mirth. She simply smiled and looked back toward the rest of the group. "What? It's only the truth you know," she said with her typical wide-eyed face. In his mind he heard her silently apologize toward him combined with a sense of protection. Harry didn't know if he was upset so much as astonished. But he was relieved to get free of the lecture he knew he would have received if Luna hadn't distracted her. Finally he shrugged and commiserated with the Marauders about that and other things while they waited for their train to arrive at its destination.

A short time later the train slowed to a stop at Hogsmeade. Per previously discussed plans they decided to wait for the rest of the students to disembark before they actually left. So as the last students not in their compartment climbed out of the train the group pulled everything out of the compartment so Harry could remove the charms. That accomplished they made their way off they deposited all the trunks back into the compartment and then made their way toward the carriages, only to find one more remaining. This seemed just as odd to Harry as the bump up on arrival days at Hogwarts. While Harry could have accepted the team not receiving a letter as an oversight, the fact there was only one carriage there was smacking of a greater plot.

Finally Ron announced what was on the minds of nearly everyone else, "So how do we get up to the school then, walk?" This comment caused James to glance between him and other three Marauders questioningly. It was as if they were all having a conversation of some kind.

Harry, not wanting to go through trust issues this early, nor willing to let on he knew more about this school than the Marauders thought, said, "I would assume so Ron. The spells won't work on the carriages like they did on the train I think. I can spot a couple of runes on it that would forbid it."

“It almost looks as if someone doesn’t want us here,” Neville commented as he hung his right arm by his side ready to release his wand from his holster. “Wands out you think?”

“W why would we need our wands out?” Peter asked, looking confused.

Harry shook his head. “Not right now, but keep them ready in case.” They all had on their wand holsters on both arms, but by planned convention only their school wands would be used here. Even though it was standard procedure to be ready to draw their wands at a moment’s notice, he figured it would be prudent to give the others a reason for their upcoming actions. Finally he answered Peter’s question by saying, “There should be at least one more carriage here, as there are ten of us. That, combined with the fact we never received the letters you got about our early departure means that something is wrong here. Given where we came from, we aren’t going to take a chance about anything.” James seemed to support this, along with Remus. This quickly convinced the other two Marauders and they were quickly on their way.

Interestingly enough nothing happened on the hike up to the castle except for a very insistent thestral trying to get some of them to board the carriage. Team Gamma entered the grounds before the Marauders, and the gates closed right behind Peter, who was the last one to enter. The Marauders seemed to relax on their way up to the front door, and it was looking like Team Gamma could to. But just before they reached the front door there was a melodic toll of alarm followed by three things: a burst of flame, an explosion of ice, and a mound of dirt erupting from the ground. The entire group stopped, and if it weren’t for the feelings of alarm he was getting from Hedwig, he would have considered it normal. Instead he paused as the majestic phoenixes seemed to hover in the air slowly flapping their wings as they floated down toward ground. The Marauders stopped as well to blink at the spectacle before them. Each of the new trio was looking at their familiar attentively, communicating on a nonverbal level. “Lilith”

Luna looked up at the door, then followed her familiar's advice and looked above the door, but found nothing. Hermione, picking up on a comment through their bond, drew her wand and started a long murmured incantation while going through several wand movements and pointing it at the archway above the door. Luna was the first to see the stones making the door frame above the doors glow, followed by Harry then Hermione through their shared bond. Soon it started to glow to everyone else, but nothing seemed to happen. Finally Harry pulled out his wand and motioned Neville and Ron forward. Hermione's voice started to become more audible and more pronounced as she cast. Then the others started to join in tandem after they got the beat and words that Hermione was casting over and over. Finally the glow coalesced into recognizable patterns. Harry held up his hand to indicate that they should stop as Hermione did. The chant died off, leaving the patterns to glow for another few minutes. "Can you decipher them?" Harry asked Hermione quietly.

Hermione shrugged in a helpless gesture, but her inside voice to Harry and Luna were completely different. 'They're compulsion runes, Harry. I have no idea who put them there, but I know they're relatively new, comparatively speaking that is. I don't understand all the parts, but they seem to have one of about five effects. They'll inspire either recklessness, cold indifference, callousness, isolationism, or indifference. The only thing I can make out of the runes I don't understand is that they're triggering runes, but what they're based upon I don't know.' As the runes started to fade, he looked between the two of them and carefully schooled his face. "I don't like the looks of those. Anyone have any clues as to what they are?"

While the other three of the Ministry Six were not convinced by Harry's proclamation, but weren't about to give them away either. The Marauders seemed equally confused, save Remus. He looked at the runes for a few moments and said, "I can recognize the type of runes, but not anything else. Does anyone have any parchment and quills on them?" Hermione quickly took out some and passed them to Remus who quickly tried to copy down what he could before they could fade away. Peter seemed more focused on Harry, Hermione and Luna than the runes, and his face was far too inquisitive for Harry's comfort. But he shook off the creepy feelings the rat's gaze

and looked at each of his group. "Suggestions? We don't have long before a professor comes looking."

Luna was the first to speak saying, "It took quite a bit of power to just be able to see those runes. To actually take them down would be even harder, not to mention attracting sniveling protags and whoever would send them to monitor this. I can set a spell on us to shrug off the effect of that ward. It doesn't look fatal, or there would be a mass of bodies here." Harry smiled warmly at his girlfriend and nodded. The rest seemed to mull over that suggestion and agreed. So thus Luna went around and cast a spell on each person. The phoenixes then trilled happily and flew up to land on their respective person's shoulders, and Luna picked up her snorkack so they could all go inside. The magic from the wards tried to settle over them but the spell prevented it, and as soon as they stepped toward the great hall the shields shattered, taking the magic with them.

They passed the group of first years and entered the great hall, seemingly oblivious to Professor Standish who had been watching them enter. The noise of the hall seemed a welcome relief to the entire group, a relief that soon died as the hall went quiet and they all looked toward the door. Professor McGonagall got up and headed toward the group, her face set in her normal stern expression. "May I ask who you all are, and why you're in Hogwarts student robes?"

Harry stepped forward, but paused as James cleared his throat. A glance back told Harry that James was full well meaning to do what he thought his job was as he stepped forward to answer her. "Professor, on behalf of the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter, I present to you the Ravenshire Survivors, who have been accepted here at Hogwarts."

The look of confusion on Professor McGonagall's face was not missed by anyone as she responded, "What do you mean, Mr. Potter? I was told the Headmaster received a letter last week stating they decided to seek further private education."

"Indeed," the aforementioned headmaster interjected as he approached, "I received the letter a mere hour before we sent out the

letters announcing the early Express schedule. We are not prepared to house these six.”

James looked back to Harry in complete surprise, who looked back at his father with a questioning frown and raised eyebrow. He then turned back to the headmaster and professor and responded, “I really don’t understand sir, they’ve been with my family for the past month. And while I cannot be with them every minute of every day, I have not heard them even think about considering not going. In fact, they’ve been looking forward to this trip all week. I hardly think they would back out so soon after being sorted, do you?” James didn’t even have to lie, as he had heard some of the non-secret plans the group had made for attending Hogwarts.

Harry let his face turn thoughtful as he looked Dumbledore up and down. It wasn’t for the first time that he wished he was a legilimens, but even if he were, he couldn’t risk attacking Dumbledore in that manner. Especially not when he could easily turn it back on him. So instead he shrugged and said, “I’m sure your house elves are the best in the land, Headmaster. We’re here and I am willing to go under truth spell to show that we definitely did not send any refusal letters. So I fail to see why you can’t get them to set something up, even if on a temporary basis until our dorms are completely ready.”

Dumbledore’s eye twinkle seemed to lessen a bit but he still had something to say, “Did you not wonder why you did not receive the early travel letters? Not that I don’t believe you, but I wonder why you didn’t write when they received mail and you did not.”

Harry shrugged as his friends let him be the spokesperson for the group. “Sir, I had assumed that you remembered where we were staying and thus sent the letter to James for all of us. But to be honest, I was concerned. I was more concerned when there was only one carriage for all ten of us. That’s why we’re a little late, as we had to walk up to the castle. Now, can we take our seats please? If you wish we can talk about this after feast, but we’re holding everyone up, and I’m sure they’re hungry.” Harry refused to look the older man in the eyes, instead focusing on his nose.

Silence reigned for a good two or three minutes before Dumbledore gave up on things and smiled widely in that magnanimous grandfatherly expression of his and answered, "No Mr. Penwell, that will not be necessary. Professor McGonagall will escort you to a guest sweet where you will stay for the next week until further accommodations can be made for you. In the meantime, please feel free to sit with your individual houses."

None of the group felt like arguing and instead took a seat to await the sorting. Luna sat next to him while looking about in her typical spacey continual surprise expression she was famous for in their time. He reached under the table to give her hand a gentle squeeze just before the Sorting Hat started to sing.

"Each year I am sat upon you
To find which house is your due.
Whether you be of the Gryffindor sort
Where bravery is said to rule,
Or if Ravenclaw is where you be,
Where Wit is the rule to beat.
If you belong in Hufflepuff true
Then loyalty and hard work be your due.
If Slytherin is to be your home
Then cunning and ambition roam.

But whatever your house I ask
For you to remember this task.
For the sake of Hogwarts unite
Or you will not survive this fight.
Each has an important role to play
So please heed the words I sing
And let the Sorting Begin!"

The entire hall did not seem to know what to make of this and thus it was another few minutes before the sorting actually began. Finally the last person was sorted (into Hufflepuff), and Dumbledore stood up to announce, "Before we begin this feast, I wish to introduce you to the first transfer students Hogwarts has hosted in a century. You have heard their origins I'm sure, so without further ado I give you Halstead Jeremiah Penwell and Lilith Leedham, sixth year Gryffindors,

Nathan Lambeth of Hufflepuff house, Haleigh Joyce Galway of Ravenclaw, and last but not least Ryan Bartholomew and Gwyneth Melynda Whitcomb of Slytherin. They will be spending their last two years of education with us, so I urge you to welcome them with open arms. And as I'm sure they're as hungry as you, I'll forgo the rest of the announcements until after feast. In the meantime, dig in!"

Luna gave Harry's hand a final squeeze before letting go so they could both eat. The meal was relatively quiet as they spent their time just making small talk with the people around them. Ron and Ginny pretended to ignore the glares from the other Slytherins while both Neville and Hermione both remained quiet during the feast. Soon the meal was done and Dumbledore rose yet again and called for attention, "Now that we are all fed and watered, I have a few beginning of term announcements. All first years should be advised that the forest outside the castle is forbidden from all students unless you wish to endure pain or even death. Some older students should keep that in mind as well," he added with a glance toward the Marauders. "Secondly quidditch tryouts will be on the third weekend of the month, see your head of house or your team captain if you are interested, and they will tell you what positions are open. Also please be advised that there is a war brewing in our world, so you are advised to follow all school rules for your safety. Speaking of which, Mr. Filch has asked me to remind you there is to be no spell casting in the hallways between classes, and to be mindful of the list of banned items posted on his door. Finally I would like to introduce you to Professor Grace Sumners who will be taking this year's Defense against the Dark Arts classes. She is an auror on leave from the Ministry, and she has asked me to announce anyone wishing to approach her to talk about her career should ask her after class for an appointment at a later date. Now I ask for the fifth year prefects to lead the first years to their dormitories, and wish the rest of you a good night."

James stood up immediately and approached Harry, who was not aware of him due to his watching Professor McGonagall headed his way. He gave a quick hand sign to his friends to stay, more out of habit since they would have to come to him anyway to find out where they were staying tonight. But interestingly enough Harry also saw Professor Sumners approach behind McGonagall, which in some part

he should have suspected given their rather spectacular arrival. "Mr. Penwell, the Headmaster and the Heads of Houses would like to see you and your friends in the Headmaster's office. Afterwards we will take you to your accommodations."

Harry was about to answer when two voices interrupted the conversation. The first was from the Defense Professor, "I will have to ask to be a part of that discussion, Professor. As there appears to be some kind of collusion against this group I am bound by law to investigate."

The second was from James himself and was done after the teen had shoed his friends up to the tower without him, "And I will have to go as well Professor. This group is under the protection of the House of Potter, and as such I must be present in cases such as this. At the very least I must accompany you so I can summon my father to this meeting."

Harry could sense a genuine bit of concern from James, which surprised him due to the fact he had been keeping his father at arms length. They weren't antagonistic, indeed they had several things they recognized and liked in each other. But Harry considered him a bit too arrogant and haughty, even if it were to a much lesser degree than he was led to believe from Snape. But still he did not think James would have been as concerned about them as he was appearing to be. "That won't be necessary, Mr. Potter. I assure you we can get to the bottom of this on our own. I can also promise you that they are in no danger from anyone here." Turning next to the Defense Professor she added, "While you are normally correct, Professor Sumners, may I remind you that you are on leave? No one is being charged of a crime and therefore your presence is not needed."

Harry himself frowned at the response his head of house was giving, and began not to like where this was going. Apparently James did not like it either, and for once the arrogance he had was needed to back up his position as he drew himself up to his full height. "Excuse me, Professor McGonagall, but as the Scion of the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter, I must inform you that the protection of my house had been extended and granted over these six people, known

as the Survivors of Ravenshire. They have fully accepted this, and as a result fall under my house. Therefore I must decline your invitation on their behalf, for both tradition and Ministry law dictates that they may not be questioned about any actions, whether their own or from others, without having the option to have either the Head or his Scion present. As you seem to be insistent upon violating these statutes, then I am forced to admit them sanctuary from any and all questioning regarding this incident. And since you have rather indirectly implied that they will not receive their room until after this talk, I am forced to escort them back to Hogsmeade where they will floo home. If you would be so kind as to forward their luggage to the Three Broomsticks?" This said, he turned to Harry and motioned them to come along.

Simultaneous shouts of "WAIT!" were heard on the hall from both professors. Before McGonagall could start to lecture however Sumners broke in, "Master Potter, I'm very sure that won't be necessary. I'm sure that Professor McGonagall will recognize your points as both legal and reasonable, just as I'm sure she'll remember that even an auror on leave is never truly off duty unless the leave is administrative in nature." Professor Sumners arched her brow at the older woman, her face set to remind the transfiguration teacher just who she was talking to, "And that as such I am legally bound to investigate crimes such as tampering with Owl post and denial of education. I would hate for this school to come under such scrutiny, undeserved or otherwise."

Professor McGonagall looked like she was weighing things in her mind for a few tense moments before she finally came to a decision. "Ten points from Gryffindor for your rude insinuations and comments, Mr. Potter. Ten more points for talking back to a professor. But if you two wish to follow us, you may."

Harry had to fix Ron with a glare to keep him from speaking up against such a ruling before he spoke up for the first time. "With all due respect professor, I'm not sure what more can be said that wasn't already, save to verify these mystery letters weren't from our hands. And I will exercise all of my rights when we get to the headmaster's office. So if you will please lead the way?"

McGonagall raised her eyebrow in inquiry to Harry's statements, but he made it clear he was not going to answer any more questions. Finally the woman turned stiffly and led the group of eight people up to the office. A fudge fantasy later brought them into the room where Dumbledore was seated behind his desk with Flitwick, an empty space, and Professor Standish on his right with Professor Sprout and someone he did not recognize on his left. The man on his left looked to be middle-aged and somewhat large. He looked like the kind of guy that led a very comfortable life. And if the looks of excited hunger were any indication, Harry could quickly figure out why. As the door closed Professor McGonagall made her way to her spot behind the desk while Professor Sumners stood off to the side so she could be in between and yet facing everyone.

Before James could protest anything the old man in the room spoke to his professor, "Minerva, I thought I told you we should do this quietly and alone? I do not recall asking for Mr. Potter's assistance nor that of Professor Sumner"

The woman addressed gave the headmaster an apologetic look and was about to respond, but once again James beat her to the quick, "Excuse me Headmaster, but if I'm going to lose house points for doing my duty, I might as well lose them for doing this properly. I, James Charles Potter, Scion for the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter, do hereby serve notice there are to be no talks between you and those known as the Survivors of Ravenshire regarding the problems in their attendance of this school without either myself or the Head of House Potter present. Any attempt to circumvent this declaration will be considered an insult upon House Potter which will be redressed according to both Magical Law and tradition. This one instance tonight prior to my serving notice will not be forgiven, for you were fully aware of the protections my Head of House placed upon these people. Therefore you and Professor McGonagall have both insulted House Potter tonight, and further insult was provided by your Transfiguration Professor when she punished me for performing my duty as House Scion. As punishment for this no further questions will be asked of these six people until such time as my Head of House is summoned. Furthermore they will stay here but not attend classes until this matter is solved, even if we must go to the board of governors to do so."

Harry could feel the shock from his friends, more so from Luna and Hermione. "James , don't get yours . . . "

"Halstead, silence," James bit back. "There has obviously been a conspiracy here to keep you from entering this school. I fear for your safety, and the Headmaster wishes to sweep this under the rug. I for one do not wish to do so. Auror Sumners," he said, turning toward the Defense Professor, "Do you have some spare floo powder on you? I would ask you to contact the Ministry and ask for the presence of some on-duty aurors. At the same time, if you have some extra I wish to ask to borrow some so I can contact my father after you're done?"

"THAT WILL BE ENOUGH YOUNG MAN!" Professor Standish called out. "You will apologize for your wrongful allegations and take 50 points from Gryffindor and serve a month of detentions, every single day, with Filch. You have no right to overrun everyone else. You will leave now so the interested parties may resolve these issues."

James's wand was out in a flash and pointed directly at the yelling man's face. "No, I will not take the punishment nor will I sit your detention. I will appeal both yours and Professor McGonagall's punishments with the board. You cannot stop me from exercising my legal rights, nor the rights of my family. You cannot legally punish me for doing so either. Any further attempts to do so will cause me to withdraw myself. If I do that, I'm sure The Prophet will be very interested to know why the Scion of House Potter chose to leave Hogwarts right after opening feast."

"Now now, I'm sure we can come to some kind of compromise. I cancel all punishments given to James Potter up to this point. The loyalty you're showing is admirable Master Potter but please let's keep our heads cool hear." Professor Standish looked like he wanted to say something, but did not after receiving a glance from Dumbledore. "Now, can't we please just deal with this with the people right here?"

Now it was Professor Sumner's turn to speak as she interrupted further conversation by announcing, "Ministry of Magic, Auror Headquarters." The flames turned green as she stuck her head into the fire. "Hi Mac, how's the wife? Good . . . Listen, there's been a problem up here at the school . . . Yes, it is rather early in the year, isn't it? Anyway there appears to have been someone who tampered with Owl Post and forged some letters from the Survivors of Ravenshire. Yeah, as if the poor dears haven't had enough to worry about. Something's fishy here. Can you send Rich over here to investigate? No, we're not going to do anything until help arrives. No, I think we can keep Harkness out of this for a little while at least. Okay, see you soon." She then backed up and looked at Dumbledore, "There's an auror who is going to arrive in a few minutes, please give permission," she announced in a tone which made it clear it was not a request. "And before you say anything, no this will not be kept silent. What has transpired today was a crime, and as such will be addressed accordingly." Then she handed James some floo powder so he could make his call as well.

As promised by Professor Sumners, the room remained quiet until both Charles Potter and the two men from the Ministry arrived. Harry recognized Jason right away, but did not let on as they were introduced, "This is Auror Richard Brown and Jason, head of the Department of Mysteries."

"May I ask what interest the Department of Mysteries has in this case?" Dumbledore asked without a single twinkle in his eyes.

"DMLE procedure states that two personnel be present in cases such as this, one from the Auror Department and one from any other department either a part of or attached to the DMLE. As the Department of Mysteries is a sister branch to the DMLE, and I was with Auror Brown when he was called, I opted to come and hear this case myself. Any objections Chief Warlock?" Jason had Dumbledore right then. It was well known the entire Ministry was both aware and interested in the fates of the Survivors, and the Department of Mysteries was no exception.

Dumbledore was many things: manipulative, secretive, disconnected from humanity, but one thing Dumbledore was not was stupid. Harry knew this and everyone else did to. Thus when it was put this way he had no choice but to accede. "Very well, I have no objections, Chief Unspeakable. I was merely hoping to keep whoever it was that did this from knowing we were on to him, or that we suspected anything other than a clerical error. Alas, the impetuosity of youth has already taken that from us . . ."

"Don't you dare, Lord Dumbledore," Charles warned in a low voice. "My son did exactly what I would have done in this situation. And now that he has filled me in on things, I must first point out how ashamed I am in the Hogwarts faculty. Students are supposed to be taught how to function in the Wizarding World. They are supposed to be taught to follow the traditions of our world. And yet I hear of a teacher punishing a student for following those traditions. I am of a mind to discuss this matter with the Board of Governors, for obviously the faculty is in need of review when a simple declaration of protection is taken as insulting the faculty." Charles was not looking at Minerva, but Standish as he said this, his eyes fairly pinning the latter's down.

"Your son," Standish replied through tightly clenched teeth, "Implied we are part of a conspiracy to keep these young whelps from receiving their education. That is a formal insult no matter how you look at it."

At this Harry broke out laughing so hard he had to clench his stomach for a minute. His other hand laid down on the table causing it to unconsciously land on one of the letters the Headmaster had been talking about. The rest of the room seemed to freeze for a moment in shock. Finally Harry was nudged by Hermione as Luna slapped his arm, which told him he needed to calm down. "Sorry . . . giggle I couldn't . . . chortle help it. I mean really, he never said or implied you were part of the conspiracy. He only stated you were trying to cover up that there was one, which D . . . Professor Dumbledore already admitted. It just struck me as funny that you could hear something that wrong." Harry brought up his hand to grasp the top of his head when he noticed the letter. "Hang on, what's this?" A closer look at the paper in his hand revealed the letter that Harry had supposedly

written. "Oh, this is the letter you received, Headmaster. Here, let me verify right now I didn't write this. Hermione, can I borrow parchment and quill please?"

Jason and both aurors moved closer to Harry, as did Charles. Dumbledore however had to voice an objection, "Mr. Penwell, if what you say is true than that is evidence, and you really should not be marking on it, as it will destroy it."

After taking the quill and parchment from Hermione he let Jason inspect it. Once the Unspeakable was satisfied, he opened the letter and then copied the first two sentences on the clean parchment. "I'm not marking the evidence at all, Professor. Instead I'm copying the first two sentences in my own handwriting so a proper comparison spell can be used." Once he was done handed both parchments to the Unspeakable, who then cast the appropriate spell. A discussion between Jason and Auror Brown was not needed though as the spell results were extremely conclusive. "This letter is a forgery. It was not written by Mr. Penwell, for the loops and valleys are completely off. This letter was done by someone unused to forging handwriting of this type." Jason then cast another charm on the evidence before looking up at the group. "In order to clear the allegations Mr. Standish has insisted had been made, that spell will make the hand that actually wrote this letter glow for five minutes. Will everyone please put both hands forward?"

Just then the Deputy Headmaster drew his wand and started to fire cutting spells at everyone. Harry, who had been watching him, narrowly avoided being the first target by ducking. By the time the third spell was off though Harry was already up with his wand and called out "Expelliarmus! Petrificus Totalus! Incarcerus! Stupefy!" Standish was caught in the first spell which made short work of him with the other spells and soon the man was down on the floor.

Jason pulled a magic suppression collar out of his robes and slipped it around Standish's neck. "Good work young Mr. Penwell. You'll have a good career in Magical Law Enforcement some day. You or anyone else hurt?"

“Nothing but a little hair and pride,” Ginny groused in return. She was holding a handful of red hair in her left hand while the hair on her head was about half the length of her original length. “But it will grow back.”

Harry was happy that was all that happened, but he could not afford to focus on those feelings for the moment. “His hand is still glowing.” That was true, even though it was fading fast.

Nodding once, Jason had to laugh as he stood up. “Yeah, but it’ll grow back just like you said. And as for him, it will continue to do so for the spell doesn’t draw from his power but mine. Now, about these students schooling?”

Charles, deeply upset by this nodded in agreement as he rounded upon Dumbledore, “Yes, what are we going to do about this, Lord Dumbledore? So far I must say I’m unimpressed with your level of protection. At least at my house there was no one trying to set traps for these young people.”

Dumbledore paled slightly at the insinuation as he appeared to remember the conversation they had prior to sorting. Needless to say it did not take him long to decide on about the only course of action open to him. “Lord Potter, I have already made arrangements with the house elves to provide them with accommodations until their dorms are ready. We are prepared to teach them with the normal students starting tomorrow, we just do not have their accommodations ready tonight. Will that do?”

Charles appeared to take a few minutes in thought, then nodded once before turning to Harry and his friends. “What do you say?”

‘ Harry, I think we need to think about our stay here, more importantly our sleeping arrangements,’ Hermione’s voice whispered in his and Luna’s head. ‘I am not feeling very safe here. I think there’s much more to this than meets the eye with Standish. I would feel better if at least the three of us were together, preferably with a spare room and our own common area for the other three.’

‘Are you proposing we sleep in the same bed together Hermione?’ Luna’s voice responded in similar tones. ‘I thought you still weren’t comfortable with everything yet. Not that I don’t agree with you about staying together though. Ron and Ginny have each other in Slytherin, and Hufflepuff has never been a house for prejudice against its own house members. Ravenclaw and Gryffindor are both different in that respect. They tend to look down upon things too radical from their own experiences. Thus they would be easiest to hide moles for further attempts. I just wish I knew what was behind this one. I doubt Standish was working alone.’

‘The thought of leaving you alone in Ravenclaw, given what they put Luna through,’ Harry started to think only to interrupt his own train of thought as he sensed Luna was about to, ‘No Luna, it’s not alright. It may be in the past, well . . . our past now, but you should never have gone through it, much less alone. I can’t change things, but I will make sure they won’t happen the same way again. Or at least try. It hurts us to see you in pain, no matter how much you hide it. You’d do the same for me, so why shouldn’t we?’ Harry could feel Luna’s love through their link, as well as Hermione’s assent to his words, so he continued, ‘Anyway, what I said about Luna applies to you as well Hermione. I may not have been too great in helping you through the ‘know it all bookworm’ stuff before, but I won’t let it happen again without an answer. Even Ron knows that now. We have each other, so I say we should try to stay together as much as possible. And the separate common room also gives us a place where we can talk in the public private eye as it were.’

‘You know Harry, if I didn’t know you very well, and if I weren’t thinking along the same lines, I’d wonder about your sanity from that last comment.’ Hermione’s voice chided before getting serious again, ‘Yeah, I have reservations about going that far Luna. Not the least of which is that most other people would be tempted to push for sex while we share a bed. But at the same time I do trust you enough to respect boundaries. And if I were honest, my problems with our relationship extend more toward issues from my upbringing than from anything else. Luna, I do care for you. And Merlin help me but you are making more and more sense to me each day,’ she added with a mental chuckle and a physical smile toward the young woman. ‘Not

that I mind that in the least. I think sleeping together would be the next logical step for us really. That, and my gut tells me that it would help me overcome my problems, which would lead us closer. Please? I don't want to be alone anymore?' The last felt like a desperate plea from Hermione, as if she had been feeling so for some time.

That feeling only confirmed that something was wrong with her. He knew something had happened that was not directly related to them, but had decided to give her space, until now. 'Hermione, while I know that now is not the time to discuss this, I would like to hear what happened to you. I can feel your sadness, and while I know it doesn't directly relate to me, I would like to know what it is . . . Bah, I'm not very good at this kind of thing really. But if you want me to I'll try, for you.'

Hermione smiled and walked over to take Harry's hand, her face beaming. The other people in the room seemed to be staring at them, though Hermione and Luna were completely oblivious to them all. Luna quickly joined with them, taking Harry's other hand and offering a look of support to Hermione. 'Thank you for trying Harry. Please don't feel inadequate for not having the precisely right words. Given what you've been through in your life, what you said just now was a huge step. And yes, I'll tell you what happened, for I could really use your comfort right now.'

'So you're ready to talk about it now?' Luna asked as she caught the other witch's eye.

'Yes Luna, I am. But not here. We all know occlumency but we don't want to give the chance for Dumbledore to intercept anything. Speaking of which,' her voice whispered with something akin to realization, 'I think they're waiting for you to say something, not to mention wondering what's going on. Harry, I leave the secret of us in your hands, do what you have to, but you know what I want.'

Harry could feel agreement from Luna to the sentiment as he moved his eyes to first look at Charles, then to the faculty. "Actually, that's not alright," Harry replied to the question. "I may be a half blood, but I've heard of a muggle saying that fits this situation quite well from my

standpoint, "Where there's smoke, there's fire." What that means where there is an indication that there's a problem, the problem is normally there. That Standish could perpetrate this kind of thing, and what his ultimate goal was when we showed up at Platform 9 and 3/4 tomorrow, is still not known. And until evidence points to the contrary, I have to suspect he was not working alone. Quite frankly with the way today has gone I can't afford to trust anyone blindly, even you Headmaster. As a result I must ask for the following changes to that plan: First, we six will be provided a room to stay in while we are waiting for more permanent arrangements as originally stipulated. We will be allowed to attend classes with our individual houses, but until permanent arrangements have been made we are under no obligation to do anything else we do not wish to with them, nor are we officially part of those houses. That means no docking or awarding of house points, no pressure from any of them, or anything. Second, three of us, consisting of myself, Ms. Leedham, and Ms. Galway are to have a suite together with our own common room when the permanent quarters are assigned. Third, the other three of the Survivors of Ravenshire will have access to our common room. Anyone else seeking permission to enter the suite needs permission from one of the six of us. We also reserve the right to periodically search for any monitoring, eaves-dropping, spying, or mind-altering charms. This suite must also have a password protected fireplace which must be connected to the floo network outside the castle. Finally we must be able to change any and all passwords, including entrance and floo, by ourselves without the aid of anyone else. Once we have all that, we will be officially part of Hogwarts and our individual houses. Only three of us won't sleep with our houses on a regular basis."

"I'm sorry Mr. Penwell, but I'm afraid I can't fulfill your requests," Dumbledore replied a little sadly. "It is against school rule for any student to be living outside of the common house dormitory. I'm afraid there's nothing I could do."

Harry stood still for a moment in conference with Hermione before he spoke up, "Haleigh, could you get your copy of Hogwarts, A History out please? I know you were reading it on the train." When she produced the book he had her help find the applicable page before

answering Dumbledore. "Actually sir, there are circumstances that make this request just within school rules. I quote:"

"Any student married before leaving school, wither through Muggle or Wizarding rites, are permitted to take residence in the married student quarters. Furthermore any students engaged through either through marriage contract or soul bond may also take residence within aforementioned quarters upon reaching their legal adulthood or gaining permission from their families, whichever comes first."

"Quite simply sir while we may not be married, the three of us are engaged. And since we are emancipated, we fall under those rules. Thus what we want only bends the rules slightly, since there's nothing against the rules that says we can't change passwords ourselves."

"But how can you three, two young ladies and a young man, have marriage contracts?" Professor McGonagall asked with a shocked tone in her voice. "Your parents are dead, and you told me you didn't have any marriage contracts."

Harry ignored the pointed looks from Charles and Jason and smiled at Professor McGonagall. "You're right, we don't. But we are soul bonded." He gave re-assuring looks at Charles as he groaned and sent the man a wink. "And as for the reason for the floo and the access we asked for, we are all still undergoing therapy from the Battle of Ravenshire. We do not wish to have our Mind Healer parading around Hogwarts. It would give too much away to whoever is behind this."

'Harry, is that a good idea, telling Dumbledore about the therapy?' Hermione's voice asked nervously.

'Not really, but he'd find out about it within a matter of days anyway. We'd have to clear the visits through the Headmaster, Deputy Headmaster, or the Head Nurse. If we tell him now and give him a plausible cover story, we avoid having bigger problems later.' Harry turned his eyes toward the Headmaster and arched a brow. "In return we will agree to be quiet about this attack publicly, only saying there is an ongoing investigation about what happened and supporting your

ideas for the cover-up story over the replacement of Standish so long as it does not reflect negatively upon us. Will you agree?"

Dumbledore sat there for a few long minutes, his eyes twinkling only slowly. Harry could feel a brush of legilimency against his mental shields, but nothing was there. Finally he nodded an agreement. "Very well, Mr. Penwell, the arrangement for your accommodations will be as you have asked. The only stipulation is that your Heads of House, in this case Professor Flitwick for Ravenclaw and Professor McGonagall for Gryffindor, know the passwords for your quarters and floo. Is there anything else you wish to request?"

Harry looked around the room to his friends with a questioning look. Each person shook their heads mutely as they moved up behind Harry. "No sir, there's nothing else we have. Is there anything else you need us here for?"

"No Mr. Penwell. Professor McGonagall, will you be so kind as to show them to their quarters?" The transfiguration professor agreed, and after a few parting words to the others all seven students followed her out of the office. After a few twists and turns they found themselves on the third floor at the guest quarters. "This will be your quarters for the next few days until we can get everything settled in. There are three bedrooms here, so please make yourselves at home." Everyone save James (who was not staying there) nodded and started to file in. As Harry went in last he heard the other two people start to move off while quietly talking amongst themselves.

"Well everyone," Harry said as the door closed, "Here we are." Ron gave an all clear sign and Harry relaxed a little more. "Okay, when we get our permanent rooms, the three of you," he started, indicating Ron, Ginny, and Neville, "Will be more than welcome to come into the common room at any time. We'll also meet there as often as possible to discuss common rumors and the like. In addition, we'll find a way to meet in the Room of Requirement for training, frank conversations, and other secret things. I want each of you to see if we can find a way to reach either that room or another more hidden one on a regular basis that doesn't draw attention to the fact we're having a meeting we don't want anyone else to know about. At the very least its good

to have a back-up plan in case our meetings there are discovered.” He took a deep breath and let it out, deflating as he did so. “I don’t know about the rest of you, but I’m pretty much knackered. Luna, Hermione and I have something to talk about before we go to bed, and we need to be on our guard for tomorrow. So I think we should all just turn in.” With this he took Luna’s and Hermione’s hands and started to lead them to the supposed master bedroom for the suite.

The trio remained silent as they took care of their belongings the House Elves had just brought in. They each set out a change of clothes for the next day as well as their normal bed wear. Harry felt shy around them as he wore the least, a pair of boxers with no shirt, but he was helped by the fact each of the others felt equally nervous. Finally they made their way to the bed and paused. “Erm. . . how do we do this?” Harry asked, drawing a blank.

Luna looked between them and smiled comfortingly, though there was a distinct nervousness in her voice as she spoke. “While normally I would suggest Halstead in the middle and each of us on either side, tonight I think Hermione should be in the middle, if that’s okay?”

Hermione seemed fine with that, and even a little bit relieved as she said, “Anyone else and I’d be asking for some kind of escape route, in other words being on one side or the other, but I really need a hug from both of you for this.” That said, she climbed into the bed and sat up against the headboard, leaving room for them on either side. Harry chose her right side while Luna chose her left, and they both climbed into bed and held her. Silence reigned for a little time before Hermione began to speak. “My parents did not know what was happening in our world, at least after second year. You have no idea how close they came to pulling me out of school over the basilisk incident. I had to assure them events like that were not common place, and beg and plead with them to allow me to return. You see, I’m an only child and therefore they are very protective of me. We didn’t know the big picture back then, and therefore I didn’t have any way to argue from a safety standpoint other than to keep the truth from them. So I had to keep them in the dark. And as much as I hated to lie, and as bad as I am at lying, I had to. I couldn’t bear the thought

of leaving you alone Harry. Even then I couldn't stand it. You meant too much to me."

"Did you . . . fancy me then?" Harry asked quietly.

"I don't know Harry. I felt it could have been you or Ron, but you didn't express interest and Ron . . . Well, he was always hurting me. I thought for a while it was what those psychiatrists say about a young boy taunting a girl he cares for because he doesn't know how to express it and wants her attention. Fourth year I could have strangled him for all the mixed signals he was giving out. And you were crushing on Cho, and obviously not interested in me that way." Hermione had gentle tears rolling down her cheeks as the frustration she was feeling then started to rise up to the surface, but she made no effort to wipe them away. Luna squeezed her in a comforting manner and did that for her though, thus allowing for her to continue. "And fifth year the dance continued, though I started to see Ron wanting . . . something. I don't know what. It was more than homework, and I almost had myself convinced it was a relationship. You were so angry at everyone, and you lashed out so much. It hurt that you were so angry with me. Even when you had reason to be. That made it worse you know. You were right to be angry over the summer. I should have tried something." She shook her head viciously as Harry made to interrupt again, her eyes all but pinning his mouth shut. "No Harry. I know you're sorry for remaining angry for so very long, but its as much my fault as yours. You kept the grudge throughout a good portion of the year and I both betrayed your trust during the summer and couldn't make up my mind on what I wanted. So we're both at fault there."

Harry wanted to rebut this, but knew better. Instead he simply nodded and filed it away to think about later. In the meantime, Hermione continued, "So my parents did not know what was going on in our world. Oh, they wondered why my letters home contained more gossip and fluff than anything else, and why I was centering more on Ron than I was on you, but they really didn't ask much. I guess they assumed it was either a crush shifting or there was simply more happening around him than you." She smiled at Luna's snort and said, "Which is what I wanted them to think. But that all came

crashing down at the end of fifth year. While we were in the hospital Dumbledore sent a letter to my parents. He told them everything. It was almost as if he knew exactly what I had told them and what I hadn't. He filled in all of the gaps, and explained your part in the war. Somehow they got it in their heads you went looking for trouble. They were convinced that you knew it was a trap and demanded we go with you anyways. I came home to two very angry parents, who demanded to know why I lied to them. I told them what I could, and tried to reason with them, but their minds were made up. They were going to take me away and hide me. They even forbade me from seeing you ever again. So we fought."

Harry had to squeeze her tightly at that point, though he didn't know what to do otherwise. Finally he took hold of her hand and squeezed it lovingly as he waited for her to calm down. Eventually she continued the story, even though it was easy to tell she was still upset. "I was desperate Harry. To me they were taking away my life, my friends, and you. I couldn't stand that. Even though I wasn't aware of it consciously at the time, I was most upset at the thought of leaving you. Finally I ended the argument despite their wanting to continue by running to my room and locking the door. All I could think about was how to get away and get to you. Then Luna came to get me. At first she was like a lifeline, something to keep me from drowning in my sorrow. Then she told me you needed me. That you were hurt. I had to leave then. I tried to reason with my parents one more time, telling them I couldn't leave others to die because I did nothing. But I never gave them a chance to respond. I went outside and we went away. Sun Tsu removed their bindings and let them up, and we disappeared without ever giving them a chance to say anything else."

Tears flowed down Hermione's face like a river now. Harry turned slightly to draw closer to her as he raised his back hand to stroke her hair. He recalled it helping him relax, so he thought he would do the same. He could see Luna rubbing her back while holding her other hand. She sobbed for a while as she hung her head. Finally the tears slowed again and she raised her head to look at them. "My relationship with my parents is nearly over. I left them barely saying goodbye, and as much told them it was my life and I would live it my way. I disappointed them horribly, and I don't know if they'll ever want to see me again. At least I told them I loved them before I left. But . . .

when we get back I'll be at least 23 years old. For them it will have been a few months. For us it will be five or six years. We'll have changed so much by then. And the three of us will be married by then." Harry was shocked at that, for he wasn't even thinking about the marriage part of the equation. To be perfectly honest, he was taking this entire thing a day at a time and was just following his heart. "Relax Harry, I know you haven't thought about it yet," Hermione replied to his unspoken thoughts. "But you know that's where we're headed. I can't deny it any more. A part of me wonders why I tried to fight it for so long. But then there's this part. You see, I broke my parents' hearts by leaving like I did. I defied them. They were so angry that I left with people who attacked them. When Jason went to get their signatures, Daddy was apparently stone faced and just signed it, saying something about that being the way I wanted it. I can only think he saw it all as a betrayal."

Harry was out of things to say, and not just due to not knowing much about families. He wanted to say something, but could not for the life of him think of a single thing to say. Luna appeared to be the same way. Hermione though made it easy for them by continuing on, "And now when we go back, not only will I be five years older, but I'll be married. And not only will I be married to the man they wanted me to stay away from, but also to another woman. Harry, my parents are Christian, much like the rest of the English speaking Muggle World. Their religion won't recognize the marriage, and thus in their eyes I'll be a scarlet woman. Worse yet they'll know I'm bisexual. They raised me to think of bisexuality and homosexuality as wrong, and yet here we are. It's why I fought this so long, and my greatest fear. I'm afraid they'll turn their backs on me because of all this, and I'll be all alone in the world."

"But that's just it, Hermione," Harry said almost automatically. "You won't be alone. You'll have us. And we'll never leave you. I know I can speak for Luna on that score." Luna bobbed her head up and down furiously in whole hearted agreement. "And don't think for a moment you'll be alone when you face them again. We'll be right there by your side, fighting to keep them in your life. We'll stand by you and try our best to help you make them see that you're still the same sweet, loving, strong child that you always were. Nothing inside

you has changed, save for this one thing. We'll do our best to make them see that. I promise you."

Harry could tell that helped, and that Luna agreed with him wholeheartedly. "Hermione, your parents love you. They never saw you as a trophy, as something to prop up to everyone else to be proud of. They raised you to follow your heart, and you did. Harry and I will help you make them see that. I don't think they'll choose their faith over you. It will be rocky at first, you know that. But I have every faith in your winning them over. And Harry's right, we'll be with you every step of the way. And no Blithering Humdingers will stop us from being there. That is a promise. I love you Hermione, and I'm sure Harry does too, even if he can't really define it yet. We're not leaving you."

"Thank you. . . thank you both so much," Hermione cried as she drew them close. Harry could tell they made headway in her tonight. He was thankful for that. He held her tightly as he started to slide them both into a laying position. Finally they hugged each other fully, and one by one they drifted off to sleep. Harry's last thought as he finally succumbed was that he hoped he could love them as much as they appeared to love him.

Chapter 8: Rolling Downhill

Married Students Quarters

Gryffindor Tower

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

September 27, 1975

Ron's POV

Ron and Ginny slowly made their ways through secret corridors toward the Gryffindor tower. The past week had been rather interesting in several ways, though most of them were not good. It was almost as if the first day was a harbinger for things to come. While they had for the most part settled in their classes well enough, the teachers were suspicious of the new students, and the existing students were following suit. But for some reason McGonagall was one of the worst teachers of the lot. She was quick to judge any of the new transfers, especially those within her own house. Gryffindor and Slytherin both had Transfiguration the first day, and while Ron had wished he could have joined the class he really was happy he wasn't there for that disaster. From what Ginny had told him, the older professor reminded her of more of Snape than of anyone else.

At first he didn't want to believe it. McGonagall used to be one of the fairest professors they had. While she was always more stern and strict than Ron would have liked, he could at least count on her fairness. But when their permanent accommodations were ready, he saw for himself just how bad she could be. The day Ron, Ginny, and Neville had moved into their dorms she had told the other three they were to move into their standard dorms as well, despite the conditions set forth at the meeting the first day. So at first Harry dug his heels in and simply refused to budge while stating that was not what was agreed upon. Then McGonagall started to take house points off, quickly followed by detentions when Harry dug in even farther. Ron could have told her that wouldn't work, for Harry was as stubborn as they come when he thought his friend's safety was on the line. Ron took one look at Neville and nodded, then took off to find James. Luckily enough James had known today was the day they would be moving to permanent quarters and was on his way there. So Ron wound up running into James, literally. James seemed to

expect something like this, so the head marauder simply turned Ron around and sent him ahead to stall until James could arrive.

Ron was very thankful he didn't have to explain what was going on to James, for he did not want to be the proverbial messenger that got shot. Ron followed quickly behind him, and arrived just in time to find Minerva give Harry a month's detention for his attempts at quote "running the school" end quote. James cleared his throat to interrupt the argument, then quickly began to discover what was going on. Once Harry had explained the facts (with many outraged expressions from the transfiguration professor) James stood tall and ordered them all back into their guest quarters. Then, not giving McGonagall a chance to object, informed her that if the original agreement was not upheld he would pull them out of Hogwarts and send them home. Eventually James managed to get it through to her he could and would follow through with the threat, and that if he did his next call would be to the Board of Governors. Ron watched the older woman turn pale as her lips seemed to disappear. That was the last thing he saw before they all went inside.

Several minutes later James and Dumbledore came in. They were informed by the Headmaster their dorm rooms were ready for the two Slytherins and the Hufflepuff. Harry and his two fiances would have to wait one more day for married students quarters to be opened up. Ron had wanted to ask why they hadn't been already, but a look from Harry dissuaded him from doing so. Instead he grabbed his trunk and left, shaking his head. This was obviously a very different McGonagall from the one he knew, and if he were honest he liked the one from his time better, and was glad he didn't have her for class. No, the horror stories he heard from Ginny about snide comments were more than enough. One thing was clear though, it had taken threats from James to convince her to abide by the agreement. So in effect if James hadn't stepped in, then Harry, Hermione and Luna would have been stuck in the regular dorms.

Finally they made it to Harry's suite after dodging one last pair of Slytherins. A rapid five knock pattern alerted Luna to their presence, and a moment later the brother and sister duo were inside. Harry was laying on his back on a couch with his feet on Hermione's lap. Luna smiled and hugged them both before joining the her lovers on the

couch at Harry's head. Neville was sitting on a chair facing the couch, and another chair appeared to be empty. Seating space is rarely a problem to a wizard or witch however as Ginny quickly transfigured the chair into another two person couch. Ron smiled at Ginny and nodded in thanks as he took his seat, then looked over at the trio. "What happened this time?" This was a good question as Harry's trouble curse seemed to follow them to this time as well.

"Someone decided to give me an impromptu lesson in dodging, not that I needed it," Harry answered dryly. "Then McGonagall came up and docked me points and gave me another detention. Not that I needed any more of those either." Frowning he started to sit up and pull the two witches to him. "Is it me or does she seem to be a little more . . . Snape-ish than she was in our time?"

"It's not you Harry," Neville replied. Ron had to silently agree with him, especially given the thoughts he was having before he arrived here. "And it's not directed just at you either. Hufflepuff is mad at me because I keep losing points with her. They're used to being pretty much ignored by everyone except Sprout. Now though, they're dealing with my being singled out in our classes."

Gryffindor and Slytherin had N.E.W.T. level transfiguration together as did Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff. It was the same in their classes, as Harry already knew, so he didn't really need to say anything to affirm it. "So, does anyone have any idea why she's like this? Or what we can do about it? Standish is still in Ministry custody, and talking to Professor Dumbledore is useless, so what can we do?"

Not surprisingly, Hermione spoke up next, "I'm not entirely sure what is causing it. I'd contribute part of it to the rune ward at the entrance, but what little I can decipher of it right now would indicate its directed at children, not adults. As far as what to do? I don't know. Confrontation seems pointless as she'll start deducting points the moment you bring it up." Hermione sounded like she had direct personal knowledge there, which caused Ron to shiver slightly in sympathy.

Ginny, however, chose to voice that opinion, "Sounds like you have personal experience on that subject Hermione. If so, I don't think it was a good idea to confront her alone again. If anything would have happened to you, Luna and Harry would have taken the castle down around her ears. I however have discretely brought the subject up to my fellow Slytherins, and so far they tell me her attitude seems pretty spot on normal. In a way they compare her to Slughorn, only abusive about it. If she likes you she's nice but a little stern. If she doesn't, then she can be the hardest person in the world to please. She's nothing like what we knew her as. I think there is magic involved somewhere, but I can't figure out where. Bill or the Twins probably could have, but me?" she ended apologetically with a shrug.

"Ginny, don't," Luna piped up. "We all have our own places in this group. And there's not a single one of us that's defenseless. But you're right, there's magic here that's hindering things. I can see several spells on McGonagall that are probably heavily influencing her, both in opinions and in attitudes. The Nargles are also telling me that she spends a lot of time with Dumbledore. She's his second hand witch," she said with a shrug. "But they haven't seen him cast anything on her yet. I'd have to thoroughly examine her to find out anything further though. And I dare not risk it unless we're in craft."

Ron could tell Harry was thinking as he listened to each person in turn, and each person's report on this caused him to grimace even more. Ron was happy he wasn't in his friend's shoes, even though he knew in his heart that feeling was false. Ron and Harry shared destinies now, and this went a long way to tempering what Ron himself knew would have been his own response in the past. Finally Harry spoke up in thought, "Should we attempt it in craft? We don't know when her attitude changed, but we're effectively stymied. We can't even go to the Room of Requirement with her hounding us. And with Dumbledore working like he is . . . "

"What do you mean, "working like he is?"" Neville interjected.

"Neville, you haven't had as much experience with the personal attention of Albus Dumbledore like I have. The man is a master manipulator. He likes to move people around like pieces on a chess

board. Only he doesn't listen to his pieces because he's so focused on his goal he loses sight that the people he maneuvers have feelings. I don't think Standish was the true mastermind behind the attempt on our lives. I think there were other people involved. So as far as I'm concerned the question we have to ask about Dumbledore in this case is: "Is he the mastermind, or did he just stand back and let it happen for some reason or another?"

Ron blinked at that question as his face turned toward inward contemplation. Truth be told, Ron could see exactly where Harry was coming from. It was ironic really. If you had asked him even six months ago if he would have ever considered that Dumbledore didn't have their best interests at heart, he would have done a splendid imitation of his mother in his protests. He used to consider the headmaster to be a benign old man, barmy, but benign. But then the battle of the Department of Mysteries happened, and he learned about the prophecy. That added to Harry nearly dying, and a long talk with Ginny about how much Dumbledore had to know about Harry's home life. Those revelations shook Ron to the core and gave him even more to think about than his destiny. Never the less to say, his confidence in the old man had definitely taken a nose dive over the past few months, though sometimes he'd find his old beliefs popping up in his head. When that happened, like it was threatening to happen in this case, he would tell his old illusions to grow up and take a hike. Once he was clear of them he looked up and answered, "Harry mate, I don't think it really matters in most practical respects. At the very least he's proven himself barmy to the point it effects his reasoning abilities. I mean, how could he have not been suspicious that we withdrew just after sorting, given how hard we fought to get in? At the worst . . . he's an enemy. Any way you look at it, we have to be careful around him, and ensure that he doesn't try to do anything we can't get out of. Its obvious to all of us he can't be trusted. That's why you had Hermione and Luna secure the room, right?"

Hermione apparently decided to answer that one, though her chiding was a lot more playful than it had been in the past, "Honestly Ron, it does matter. Yes, we have to be careful around him regardless, but if he's actively trying to kill us we need to look for even bigger threats, not to mention why he's doing this. Once we find that out we'll know how hard he'll work against us in our own time. If it's a matter of him

trying to take credit for destroying Riddle, then there are ways we can work with him or around him depending on how hard he pushes it and what we want when this is all over. If he's trying to make sure Harry doesn't survive the confrontation, then that's another story altogether and we will have to take other precautions."

Harry cleared his throat, stopping Hermione from continuing on as he wanted to say something, "Ron, this is a chess match in a sense, but remember this is more like Wizard's Chess instead of Muggle Chess. Since Dumbles is playing Muggle Chess, I need you to play Wizard's Chess to give us an advantage. Motivation matters here."

Ron had to hold himself down for a moment in order to keep from getting upset at Harry's words, especially considering this made sense. But at the same he felt he had to say something about the insinuation. "I don't play with people's lives Harry. I resent your insinuation that I do. I'm not Dumbledore, nor will I ever be."

Harry smiled and shook his head ruefully. "That's not what I meant Ron. I'm sorry if you thought I was saying that. But in a way I need you to think that way, at least at the over-all picture. We can decide what we need to do from there, but we need some kind of direction, some kind of strategy. That's where you come in. Your skills in chess show you've got talent in the tactics department. And to be honest, Dumbledore makes me feel like I'm a chess piece to him, like some kind of pawn. I think this is some giant game of chess to him. I need you to figure out what his next moves are."

Ron sighed inwardly as he got Harry's point. Truth be told Ron did not like this way of thinking. He had studied their past five years together and truly did not like what he saw. He knew he wasn't in Hermione's or Luna's league when it came to intelligence, but even he could figure out something was very wrong with the way Dumbledore ran things. At first he couldn't figure it out until he started to think of the people like chess pieces and then they started to make sense. He inwardly rebelled then and swore to never think of anyone like that again. Now he was being forced to and if he were honest he didn't like it. "Harry, I don't like it. I don't want to do what Dumbledore's doing. I really don't want to start down that road, for its hard to get off. And we're talking about people's lives here. You above all people

know what that's like. You just said it yourself. He made you feel like a pawn. I can't do that to strangers, much less my friends. It's not good for anyone mate."

"Ron, you don't have to. I'm not asking you to manipulate anyone. I'm asking you to use what you know is going on to figure out what Dumbles is doing. From there we can figure out how to break it," Harry argued quietly. It was obvious to Ron he didn't like what Harry was asking him to do any more than he himself did. But finally he understood, Harry needed him to help predict the man's next actions so everyone could come up with countermeasures.

That finally made sense to Ron. Ron didn't even like to think of people in that way, but even he could see how necessary it was. Therefore he could not, in good conscience, refuse the request. So finally he blew out a deep breath and nodded. "Okay Harry, you win. I'll do it. I don't really like even thinking of people in that respect, but you're right mate." He smiled as Hermione got up and hugged Ron consolingly. "Thanks," he whispered to her.

"Don't worry Ron, Neville and I will help," Ginny spoke up after having a brief silent conversation with Neville. "I'm not in your league in chess, but I'm not bad. And we both can be your eyes and ears. People seem to be underestimating us, even when they are shown they shouldn't. It's perfect in a way."

"True. Now that I'm in Gryffindor, I'm no longer nearly as overlooked as I was when I was in Ravenclaw," Luna added. "I think between Hermione and I, we're too much the envy of the female population of the school to be overlooked. Not to mention the professors are hounding us the most next to Harry himself."

"I'm sorry about that," Harry said in a sad voice. Ron cut off a mental cuss word inside his head at the dejected sound of his friend's voice. Not for the first time did he wish he could hex those Dursleys for all they put him through. Harry had a tendency to put everyone else's problems as his own, or at least resulting from his actions. If there was one habit of Harry's he never liked, that would be it. He

really couldn't blame Harry, but at the same time he wished his friend would stop.

"Harry, stop right there. It's not your fault any more than it is Hermione's or Luna's. No one should blame you for what you feel. None of us has any say in it. None of them should have any say in it either. What's between you and those two is between you and them. They're the only ones you have to make happy. Not Ginny, Neville, me or anyone else in this school, but them. Stop beating yourself up. I may have the emotional range of a teaspoon but even I know that."

Ron was suddenly being hugged by both Hermione and Luna in gratitude, when Hermione proclaimed, "Not a teaspoon Ron, more like a tablespoon now." He leaned into the hugs from Harry's girlfriends and accepted their gratitude warmly. He missed Susan, and really wished she could have come with. But it was not meant to be, and only time would tell if there was anything between them at all. In the meantime, human contact was a good thing. He finally let them go when he got the first clue they wanted to stand up, and smiled as he heard Hermione say, "If I can't let my family upbringing weigh me down, Harry, neither can you. You don't have to forget what they did, just get over it and move on. We can make them pay when we get back."

Ron watched as Luna nodded in agreement before adding her own comments, "It's not your fault Harry. To be honest, I am thankful to be in Gryffindor, even with the problems that we're having now. The Ravenclaws weren't the nicest of people you know." She took a moment to think then added, "To answer the original question: Yes, we should attempt to find out what is wrong and fix it in craft. An announcement tonight at dinner will . . ."

Just then an owl tapped on the window of the quarters. They all turned to look at the owl before it tapped again in a specially prepared sequence. Ginny quickly got up to let the owl in and fed it a couple of treats while she looked at the letter. It was then handed to Harry who quickly sat straight up when he saw the address. A few minutes later saw him reading the letter which was apparently short and to the point. Nodding once he leaned back. "Well, we don't have to consider whether or not to hit McGonagall, we've just been ordered to after

feast tonight. Standish has received 20 years in prison. McGonagall is a shoe-in for Deputy Headmistress. We're also to meet with our in-school contact in 10 minutes. Everyone get into cloaks."

Ron, Ginny, and Neville all kept one set of their unspeakable robes a shrunken trunk inside of Harry's. Thus it took the entire team only 2 minutes to get ready. Six minutes later the letter flashed with directions to an empty classroom on the third floor. After disillusioning themselves they made their way quickly to the third floor corridor and with the help of silencing spells made it past McGonagall's office and over to the empty classroom. Quickly but quietly they all filed in and took up positions around the room and against the wall. Exactly 10 minutes after they received their instructions a very short man in grey robes entered the room. Ron was stationed just opposite the door with Harry right beside. As soon as the door closed the stranger started speaking. "I am Gnome, your contact. Lower your wands, drop your disillusionment charms, and present your badges for verification."

Harry was the first one to drop his charm, but only lowered the wand, keeping it at his side. He then opened his robe to reveal his badge, which then glowed with a grey light at the short man's touch. At the same time Harry had reached out and touched the short man's proffered badge, which also glowed with a grey light. Both men were apparently satisfied as Harry motioned for his team to come forth. After verifications were done, the short man began again. "I hardly ever go on active missions as the self transfiguration that would be required to keep people from being suspicious due to my height would be onerous to maintain. Instead I work as a field officer and contact for teams such as yourself." With this the shorter man pulled back his hood to reveal Filius Flitwick, their Charms professor. Ron stood their agape for a moment before shaking his head clear. "Now I will ask you to reveal yourselves to me by using the normal reveal command of your cloaks."

Following Harry's lead they each did as ordered, earning a quick nod from the diminutive man. "These cloaks are great in hiding your identities in most instances, save for environments such as the one we live in. I have been approached by Jason to, as a favor to him, upgrade the obscuring charms on your cloaks." Then before anyone

could say anything else he was stepping up to each individual so he could cast the obviously difficult spell on their robes. Ron could see Hermione watching him closely, studying the movements and words for the charm. Once the part-goblin was done he stood back and said, "This is a conditional spell. It can be lifted only for specific individuals, not over-all. There is also a permanency charm incorporated in this charm so it does not need to be re-cast. The charm obscures both sight and sound, changing your voice so it cannot be recognized. It takes the place of your prior obscuring charms, so lowering this charm lowers the over-all effect for the individual in question. To lower the charm for a specific individual you say, "Ostendo sum mihi ut followed by the person's full name as you know them. Practice amongst yourselves now." With this the unspeakable contact took a step back and watched as the team practiced. Once he was sure of everyone's proficiency he called them all around him.

"Your target is Professor Minerva McGonagall, transfiguration professor for Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. She is due to become the next Deputy Headmaster, but is currently suspected of being under some kind of charm or curse that is impairing her ability to remain neutral in that position. Her interference is also hindering the operatives in this school from performing their duties. The department's decision was to investigate further in order to ascertain if she is doing this by choice or control. This is a Class 3 mission to be carried out right after feast tonight. You will deliver her to the Company where she will be tested, and whatever is found removed if there is anything. You are not to be seen doing this. Are any of my instructions unclear?"

Harry looked to each of his team for an answer before he gave one of his own. Ron, along with the others, shook his head in denial. The instructions were perfectly clear to him. Harry then looked back to Gnome and answered, "No, there are not."

"Good, I leave you to plan your operation then," the contact said before pulling his hood up and disappearing. This left the rest of the team with a couple of hours to plan, something Harry took full advantage of.

Professors' Corridor
Later that night
Harry's POV

The mission had been a rousing success, though only through a stroke of luck. Professor McGonagall had deviated from her usual pattern of patrols directly after feast, and had moved down toward her living quarters. Only through their version of the Marauder's Map could they find her, causing them to have to use a couple of secret passageways to get to her and some last minute illusion spells on the portraits. Fortunately they had been wearing their cloaks in blend mode (where the cloak colors blend in with the area behind them, much like a chameleon but faster) along with disillusionment charms and notice-me-not charms to avoid detection from even those people able to see through such. That, combined with silencios, kept anyone from witnessing the abduction, even the paintings, or so they hoped. They had then split up to go to their own areas, with Luna and Hermione following Harry while attempting normal conversation. "So, have either of you finished your potions homework yet?"

"I've got about half a foot left," Hermione admitted quietly. "I was hoping to finish it tonight before we went to bed. Do you need any help Athena?"

Interestingly enough, the three of them held three of the top five potions grades in their year. Harry found it ironic that he came in third to Hermione's second, and Luna came in fifth, especially considering their prior grades in the subject. The first place potions person was also on their team, Neville. Harry had to boggle at this considering everyone's potions grades before, but in the end he attributed it to Snape's bullying and rather lack of good teaching skills. In fact, Harry could hardly wait to see the year end results for the entire school. He'd bet handsome money they were all in the top 10 school-wide. Thus he could not help but to smile at Hermione's offer, even though they typically worked on all of their assignments together. "No, I'm actually done with that essay. I had nothing better to do during my break period while you were in the library and Harry was at Muggle Studies. Why do you take that class anyway Charlemagne?"

Harry smiled wide at that winked at Luna. "Easy O," was all he said while he waited for Hermione to explode.

And he was not disappointed, "CHARLEMAGNE!! I am shocked that you would take things so lightly. I had wondered why you were taking that myself, but now I know you were taking a sluff-off class just to . . ." She couldn't say anymore due to Harry putting his hand over her mouth while he stopped and faced her.

"Pheobe, it was a joke hon. You know full well I'm taking things seriously. So calm down a bit, okay?" When he got a nod from her, Harry quickly removed his hand from her mouth only to be slapped on the shoulder by the bushy-haired woman. "Ow! What was that for?"

"That was not funny," Hermione replied exasperatedly. "I mean really, you knew how upset I'd get, and you made fun of me for it."

Harry winced at this, for she truly looked upset. Glancing over toward Luna, he saw he was outnumbered and took the quick way out. "I'm sorry Phoebe. I should have known better."

Just then Hermione and Luna both burst out laughing while pulling Harry into a hug. "Just kidding," they both whispered in his hear. Now he was embarrassed, but he had to admit they got him good. All he could do is laugh weakly while Luna asked, "What's the real reason?"

Harry took a half-step back so as to allow a bit of room between them while still holding them and grinned impishly. "Well, aside from the not-so-difficult O, the upper years focus a bit on the world's muggle government, especially the British government. Those sections aren't quite as out of date as the rest of the course is supposed to be, but from what one first generation was telling me they're about 50 years behind for Britain, and about a 75 for the Americans. America still has 45 states according to those studies, with Utah coming up for a vote, at least according to the books and the teacher. But even though their wrong in those cases, it gives me a base line to understand a bit about the basic governments of the major countries of the world."

Luna nodded with her half-spaced out look on her face. "Ah, I see. The Blumbering Windigs have convinced you to look at politics. I'll get you a bowl of tomato soup." Harry could feel the kidding feelings through their bond, even though it was obvious she was really saying it aloud. He was used to this, as they normally had to keep up an image for the portraits. In fact, it was such a familiar pattern for them to fall into they did it sub-consciously. Harry began to get a little nervous when he realized what they were doing, as they were still in their Unspeakable robes. It was better not to give even the portraits ideas. Deciding to check to see if they were showing any sign of suspicion, he glanced toward the portraits around them surreptitiously, only to be frozen in his tracks. This caused Luna, who was holding onto one of his arms to jerk to a stop while kicking her foot up. Her foot caught Hermione's sleeve, causing the bushy-haired witch to turn around with a puzzled exclamation.

Harry however was frozen where he was. He was looking at the portraits around them in open-faced astonishment. They were all frozen where they were. Not a single one of them were moving in any way. In fact, they were all staring forward blindly and pointing down the corridor as if they had never been animated and were painted that way. "The paintings," he whispered quietly to the other two teens. Hermione swirled and stopped as she saw what he meant. Luna was the same way as she looked at the paintings on the other side. "It's as if they all have been petrified in that pose."

Both girls took steps closer to either side of Harry to take a closer look at the paintings. Each then took their time to thoroughly inspect the paintings, alternating between frowns and looks of bewilderment. Finally the painting Hermione was inspecting cleared its throat, which was the first sign of animation since they had started down this hallway. If it were possible the man's arm was even more rigidly pointing down the hallway even though it had not really moved at all. 'Someone has taken over the paintings and are delivering not to subtle hints for us to go a certain way. I don't detect any Dark Magic, but we can't really be sure who is controlling them.'

'I don't believe its Dumbledore,' Luna sent to both of them. 'I've gotten a couple of chances to take a good look at his magical signature, and this isn't it. This is old magic, very old magic.' Harry

had to think about this for a moment. He was naturally very suspicious now a days. In fact, he in reality only trusted those people whose actions he could easily decipher the reasons behind. His grandfather he trusted more because he felt at ease with him. He really couldn't explain it, but something inside was telling him to trust his family. His father he trusted to a certain extent because of the will. His parents did not want him raised with the Dursleys, even going as far as to take elaborate steps in attempts of keeping him out of their hands. Why the him of his future took the one will that could not be sealed by the Wizengamot with them he didn't know yet, but he had his theories. Hermione and Luna of course had the soul bond with him, which united them in ways few could really understand. Ron and Ginny, while not perfect, were steadfastly showing where their true loyalties lie. He could trust them. Neville of course was Neville, and had pretty much always been either neutral or a stalwart friend. The others from his time really didn't have any bearing in his present, so he was satisfied with putting them on the back burner.

‘Any idea who could be doing this?’ Harry thought silently as he peered down the hallway. Upon receiving a negative response from both of his loves, he finally drew his wand and sent, ‘Okay, we’ll follow for now, but keep your wands at the ready.’ Long hours of practice with these two allowed them to seamlessly flow into a triangle formation with Harry at point and Luna to his back left, leaving Hermione to the back right. Slowly they made their way down the hall until the portraits started to point in the opposite direction from the way they were walking. There they stopped, backed up a few steps and considered what was in the hallway. The hallway seemed to be rather plain by Hogwarts standards with stone floors, walls and ceilings. A red running rug was stretched down the hallway leaving about a foot to each side uncovered to reveal the floor. To their left seemed to be a painting of an elderly man reminiscent of one of the many versions of Merlin. The odd thing about this painting is that it was pointing but unlike its neighbors it was pointing forward toward the other wall. Hermione of course was the first to note the strange positioning and turned around to see a suit of armor about Harry’s size, its hands resting upon a shield that came up to about mid-calf. It was the only decoration in this section of hall that wasn’t pointing somewhere.

The suit of armor seemed to be standing at attention while its hands were resting on the top of the shield. It seemed to be a suit belonging to some kind of nobility. It was of high quality workmanship and featured a gold-colored coronet which seemed to be fused to the helm. While the workmanship and position seemed odd enough when compared to the other suits of armor, the most unique thing about this suit was that its helm was leaned forward almost as if it was actually being worn by someone and that person was looking down at them from the pedestal on which it was standing. Harry was staring up into the eye slits of the helm contemplatively, and was therefore surprised by Luna jiggling his elbow. This caused him to jump for a moment and look to his left into Luna's eyes. "What?"

Luna simply smiled and pointed toward Hermione who was crouched down inspecting the coat of arms. "Charlemagne, these arms look familiar. Where have we seen them before?"

Harry took a few moments to consider the question before the answer popped in his head from the long and sometimes exhaustive lessons on the Potter family. "I believe their Godric Gryffindor's personal arms," he mused quietly. Even with the portraits colluding to lead him here he still didn't trust them and was therefore a bit reticent to say anything that would reveal his identity.

"Quite right young man," a voice declared from behind them. Again instincts drilled into them over the summer came into play and the three of them turned in concert to cover the area behind him, with Luna covering high and Hermione covering low. Harry had the center area, but it appeared not to matter since there was no one behind them but the painting, which spoke again, "Young heir of Godric Gryffindor, I bid thee welcome. May I ask your name?"

"Charlemagne," the unspeakable team leader answered.

This earned a hearty laugh from the portrait which caused its hair to blow backwards as if on a gentle breeze. "I think not young heir. But given your choice of garb, I must assume you don't officially exist, and you were never here, correct?"

“That would be correct, sir,” the young heir said quietly. “I am the heir of no man or family, I have no family outside of my team, and I was never here.”

“Do not worry, not even the headmaster can force us to attempt to overcome the magic of your robes and badge. Thus he will never know I talked to you. That does not even begin to take into account your prerogatives as a founder’s heir,” the painting replied. “But that is neither here nor there. Hogwarts herself has felt your presence and has led you here. This is unprecedented really, normally she would wait for you to come claim your inheritance on your own. But seeing as how no one has successfully done so in about 500 years, she seems to have took the initiative herself.”

“You mean the castle is self aware?” Hermione asked, followed closely by Luna who seemed to have another question on her own, “And who are you? You’re certainly not a Kelia the Bloody Dragon.” Harry remained quiet as the girls had asked his questions.

“Who I am is of no importance. I don’t really reside in Hogwarts full time. My main portrait is secreted away from everyone, including the Headmaster. But the Founders wished me able to visit, based on Rowena’s visions, so here I am. And yes, Hogwarts is self aware, even if she is still mostly asleep. No one has been looking after her you know.”

“Wait, isn’t the Headmaster and his deputy supposed to be doing that?” Harry asked. “What if a founder’s heir was not available to be here?”

The portrait merely smiled at that question but did not answer. Instead he changed tracks and moved on. “Hogwarts needs you. Behind that armor lies the answer to your questions. You may of course invite your friends as they are bound to you, but no others can enter. But you must claim your inheritance here, and quickly while the Headmaster and his spies are distracted.”

“What are you talking about? What spies?” Harry asked demanding. He was quickly growing frustrated by the lack of answers.

“I know this is frustrating, young heir, but we can’t afford to run the risk of either the House Elves or the Ghosts finding us. Your questions will be answered in the chamber, if you will hurry and claim it.” Harry was about to object and argue when both girls started to try to calm him in their minds. They had both absorbed some of Harry’s distrust, but this was tempered by Luna’s visions and feelings. Finally Harry decided to agree so that they could find some answers. The spies were a compelling argument after all. Once he indicated he’d do as requested the painting smiled widely. Even though it looked rather grandfatherly the man was far from Dumbledore’s normal appearance as he responded, “Excellent. Now all you need to do is make a shallow cut on your palm and press it against the center of the Coat of Arms and say, “I (state your full real name) do hereby claim the seat of House Gryffindor as its True Heir.” If you do not wish your true identity known to anyone else, which I assume you don’t, then cast a silencing spell that surrounds the suit of armor as well as you and your companions. Founder’s magic will help re-enforce your spell so not even the House Elves can break it.”

“Do I have to include you within the spell boundaries?” Harry asked quietly.

“No young Heir, you do not,” the painting responded sagely. “In fact, now that I’ve convinced you to help the castle, I’ll be headed out of here before you enter. Once you enter the paintings will return to normal and I don’t want them to report me here.” Without further embellishment the man in the painting turned and walked out to leave the trio to their work.

Harry briefly considered turning away and leaving, given that the question of the man’s identity had not been answered, but the paintings were still pointing to the armor, including the dragon that remained where the man once stood. Finally he stepped forward and drew out a potions knife to make the shallow cut. Luna put up the silencing sphere, which flashed bright white once before becoming

invisible again. Harry then placed his bloody hand on the center of the arms and intoned, "I Lord Harold James Potter, Heir of the Most Ancient and Most Noble House of Potter do hereby claim the seat of House Gryffindor as its True Heir."

At first nothing happened save for a tingling of Harry's hand as the cut was magically healed. The blood was absorbed before the armor spoke, "Greetings Your Grace, Harold James Potter Gryffindor, Head of the Most Ancient and Royal House of Gryffindor, you and your bonded may enter." With this the suit and pedestal slid forward. The wall behind flashed once in the shape of an arched door. Assuming this door was much like the barrier at King's Cross he stepped around and through the wall into a large chamber that resembled the Gryffindor common room but richer. Dominating the far wall was a painting of a life-sized Godric Gryffindor. Luna and Hermione followed immediately after, with the wall flashing as Hermione stepped through. Sitting on one of the couches facing the wall they went through was a rather beautiful young woman about their age, though she looked very much the worse for wear. While normally they could tell she would look ageless, she looked as if she had been very, very sick and was left frail.

For some reason Harry didn't feel ambushed or even the slightest bit distrustful of the young woman in front of them, despite not recognizing her anywhere. Perhaps it was because she looked like she could have been Hermione's and Luna's love child, or maybe it was because she looked rather desperate but yet happy to see them. Something inside told him this woman was not only a trusted friend, but someone that he was rather intimately familiar with. It wasn't until she spoke though that he could finally place her, "Thank Merlin you decided to come. I'm sorry for being so forward, but times are very dire." The voice conveyed great age which seemed at odds with her appearance, and her movements were solidly graceful. Even though it should have been impossible, he could only identify her one way. Only one explanation could possibly fit. He glanced back to his loves to find them absolutely gob-smacked.

He himself took a minute to finally find his voice. "You're welcome?" He was perturbed that his voice squeaked, so he swallowed before

continuing, "I take it you're actually Hogwarts?" Impossible as it was, this is the only thing that fit. She returned the question with a sad smile and a nod, which prompted Harry to continue. "Will Dumbledore know about me now? What . . ."

At the mention of Dumbledore Hogwarts's face fell into an expression of pure dislike. "No, he will not know of you. You and the other founders, as well as your associates are now protected by me. The portraits will answer to me, and will feed him mis-leading information whenever possible. The ghosts, however, are his. You'll need to be careful around them, for the portraits will have to match their stories."

Hermione shook her head loose from the cobwebs in her mind to speak up at that, "But I thought the ghosts fell under the castle's purview as well? I mean, if they want a place to haunt don't they have to follow the rules?"

Hogwarts turned her sad eyes to Hermione and answered the question, "Young Heiress I only wish it were that easy. But I can't stop them from being anywhere within me without the help of the living. The Headmaster stripped that power from me. Its one of many he's taken from me. The stairs are his fault as well."

"I had always thought there was something strange about those stairs," Luna interjected as she stared at the manifestation serenely. Harry reflected quite to himself that many people would call that statement irony. He himself liked that side of her, but still it was something that under different circumstances would make him smile widely in amusement. "They seemed too random, and I often wondered why the founders would want to make something that would potentially hinder the students."

"That's because we didn't," a deep booming masculine voice interjected from behind the Hogwarts manifestation. "We designed them to help students to get to where they most needed to be. But Dumbledore tried to rest control of them from the castle after he became Headmaster, and things were never right with them since."

Harry could note the derision in the voice of the painting, as if there was no love lost there. He peered at the painting and took a guess from the man's dress. "Professor Gryffindor I presume? I take it from the sound of your voice you don't like the old man."

Godric actually scowled deeply at the statement. "Not liking Dumbledore is a relatively minor way to put it young man. I assume you're my heir?" he returned, looking toward the manifestation for confirmation. Once he got it the painting started to take stock of the boy and waved him over. "Come here my boy, let me take a good look at you." Though when Harry jerked at the my boy, he frowned, "Sorry young heir, I didn't mean to trudge up bad experiences, but if you would come closer I'd like to take a good look at you."

Harry stood there trying to calm down from the "my boy" reference while he debated his next move internally. He could just turn around and leave, but could he really afford it. He needed some way not only to track the Headmaster, but some way to conduct research. There was just too many things he needed to do, and even with all six of them he'd need more help. The assorted prophecies did not make sense when put together, especially when Ron's was thrown in. How could Ron face and defeat the Dark Lord when Harry was the only one that could by another prophecy? But at the same time he didn't know if he could trust these people. He turned toward Hermione and Luna and they told him without words that they'd go with whatever he decided. Finally Harry shook his head and decided he could trust Hogwarts itself at the very least, especially since he was supposedly a Founder's Heir. He had finally broke down and read Hogwarts: A History a few months ago and knew the Heirs had some control over Hogwarts. So finally, after what must have been at least five minutes of debate, he started to walk toward the painting.

The manifestation and the painting both had waited silently for Harry's internal debate to end, and were obviously relieved when he started to walk toward them. Godric started staring into Harry's eyes as the boy approached, his head furrowing the closer he got. "Hoggy, do you still have the ability to do a thorough magical examination, or did the Fool take that away from you?" At the manifestation's nod he turned back toward Harry, who was wondering what he had gotten himself into now. "Before I explain, Hogwarts tells me the teachers

and the other students call you Halstead, though you declared yourself as Harry outside. Which is it?"

Harry felt rather nervous dropping his cover here in the castle, but he felt that if he wasn't safe here there was no where he was safe. "My real name is Harry. I'm . . . I'm from the future. Me and my friends all came back in time for an important mission as well as to get some training. In order to keep cover and keep our parents from figuring things out, we had to adopt aliases. Thus I'm known as Halstead in this time, just like my loves are Hermione and Luna in our time while they're known as Haleigh and Lilith in this time."

Hoggy frowned deeply as she looked at the Gryffindor Heir closely. "How thorough is the spell disguising you? Obviously it changes even the composition of your biology, but does it change your core's signature as well?"

Harry shrugged as an answer and turned toward Hermione who spoke up, "No, it doesn't. It was determined trying to change the imprint could have detrimental effects to the methodology of our magical resonance. Therefore we had to . . ." Hermione's face went white as her mouth formed an "O" in shock. She panickedly looked at Harry and said, "Oh no! The Map! Harry . . . The Marauder's map!"

At first Harry couldn't get what she was implying, but when he did he felt the blood drain from his face. "Oh sweet Merlin's arse . . . we need to get it away from them NOW!"

Hogwarts's manifestation looked solemn at the exclamation even if she didn't quite get the big picture. "Exactly. If they haven't seen you on the map already, it is tied into my automatic recognition function. That works on your birth given name. They'll know soon if they don't."

Luna shook her head negatively, "No, they haven't yet. At least they glossed over us so far. Though we're in danger now. Thirty percent of the futures I'm seeing from this point include James finding out your real identity now. And all of them are bad."

“What does it matter if they find out your real names? You can swear them to secrecy if needs be,” Godric interjected in misunderstanding.

Harry shook his head and sighed. “James is my father. It is imperative that he not find out who I am until we’re ready to tell him. He’s also on a short list of people related to our mission here in the past.” He frowned for a moment and considered sending Luna to get the map, though he did not want her to be alone in the halls right now. Plus her in her unspeakable gear would arouse far to many suspicions. Finally he turned toward the castle’s manifestation and took a gamble. “I don’t suppose you can you get your automatic functions to register us as our assumed names, could you?”

But Harry was pleasantly surprised when the hologram answered a positive, “Actually yes I can, but only for about a month. Every month the House Door Guardians take a scan of the residents magical cores and the list is reset, and you’d have to re-order me to do it. You’d do better to use this as a stop gap and find some way of putting that map out of circulation.”

“Harry,” Luna asked as she looked toward the wall they came in, “When did they lose that map to Filch?”

Harry tried to remember what Sirius told him, then smiled widely. “During their fifth year. It was confiscated from Filch and put into the Dangerous Objects bin until the Twins found it.” He gave Luna a fond look as he turned toward the manifestation, “Hogwarts, as Heir to Godric Gryffindor I command you to report the names of me and my five friends as their assumed names, not their birth names, on all artefacts and queries to you, save for the map in our possession.”

“Order acknowledged,” Hoggy replied with a smile, which quickly faded away. “My Lord Heir, there is something I must report. You probably won’t like it.” The manifestation turned her head to glance at Godric who seemed to shimmer slightly in the painting.

Godric started frowning deeply then spared a moment to glance and nod up and down to Hogwarts. "Harry, you said you were from the future. Was Dumbledore the headmaster at the time?" At Harry's confused affirmation he continued, "I take it from that curse scar you have a destiny. Is that right." This time Godric blinked at Harry's sudden downturn of emotion, but he quickly shook his head to clear out the surprise, "I see. Harry, I hate to tell you this, but Hogwarts detected several blocks on you, both magical and mental. There's also a memory block or two. I sent Hogwarts to get the Sorting Hat. We'll try to remove at least the magical blocks and the mental blocks, but the memory blocks are totally up to you as to whether or not we attempt to remove them."

To say Harry was livid would have been to say hell was hot. Suddenly anything lightweight in the room flew up in the air and started to fly around at a very fast rate of speed. Anything fragile within the room was broken rather quickly which only added to the debris swirling around the room. Despite all the suspicions he had about Dumbledore's real objectives, he couldn't quite believe the audacity of the man still. But as this news sunk in he lost any and all good will he had ever had for the man. He slowly sunk to the floor clutching at his sides. When his knees touched the floor he threw his head back and a primal scream of grief and rage tore from his throat. Luna and Hermione suddenly appeared on his sides, throwing their arms around him and hugging him tightly as he screamed. Suddenly the screaming stopped and his head snapped forward to bury itself in their shoulders where fresh sobs could be heard.

Some time later Harry's tears started to dry. His arms, which had been tightly hugging Luna and Hermione toward him finally started relaxing, though their embraces certainly did not. Finally another hand could be felt on top of Harry's head. It was the manifestation's hand, willed a little more solid. "My Lord Heir, I'm very sorry. I don't know what has happened in your personal past, but I know it was really bad. The only thing I can offer you is a chance to gain justice, if you want it."

"What do you want?" Harry returned, his suspicious nature returning again.

“I only want for the four of you to help me regain some portions of myself from Dumbledore. Each time he over-rides some portion of my control, he cuts me off from the magic that keeps me alive. If this keeps up, I’ll be completely usurped and dying in just under twenty years. And once I’m gone the last secrets of the founders families will be revealed to him. That and he’ll have complete control of the children. Even more than he does now. But even if you can’t do anything to help me, I want for you to be able to stand up to the Darkness that comes. Only when you have done that can you truly live life.”

Harry looked into the woman’s eyes as if trying to decipher her very soul before realizing this was in essence a hologram, a very solid hologram but a hologram none-the-less, and was therefore without a soul. But somehow he could still sense truth from her words and had to admit what she wanted is what he wanted. Both of his ladies agreed with this judgement, so in the end he sighed. “Very well, tell me what you want me to do.”

Hoggy smiled widely and reached up with the sorting hat. “Put Alastor on top of your head and sit in the chair. He will provide the necessary link not only into your head, but with the avatars of the Founders themselves.” Once he had done so he could hear more than see the manifestation continue speaking to his lady loves, “As you three are in a Triumvirate Bond, I’m afraid there will be spill-over from this process. You’ll be able to see what he is seeing, and feel what he is feeling. I’m sorry, but nothing can be done to completely stop it, but we will try to slow it down.”

‘Ah, Mr. Potter. I am sorry I could not tell you about the blocks, but such things require a second opinion from one of the Avatars before I am allowed to say anything. If you will just lean back and try not to fight me, I’ll do the rest,’ the hat instructed. Harry leaned back and tried to relax, just managing to succeed before his whole body felt like it was under the Cruciatis spell and all contact with the outside world was lost.

--Flashback 1 —

“Harry!” a voice yelled from behind him as he made his way up toward Gryffindor tower. He instantly knew the voice as Hermione’s, so he slowed down and waited for her to catch up. He would have waited for his best friends, but with everyone celebrating Hagrid’s release from Azkaban he felt he needed some time away from all the idol worshiping inside. He was never really good with being the center of attention anyway.

“Hey Hermione,” the raven-haired youth replied when she drew even with him. “Sorry I ducked out but . . .”

“Don’t Harry,” she said as she put her hand on his shoulder to stop them from getting any closer. “I know you don’t like the attention, even when it’s deserved. I understand completely. I just . . .” Suddenly she looked rather hesitant, not at all like the Hermione he knew and . . . well, cared for deeply.

“You okay Hermione?” he asked with great concern making itself plainly evident in his voice. “Is there something wrong?”

Hermione vehemently shook her head and reached up to put her other hand on his other shoulder. This was definitely not the way she normally acted around him, and for one brief moment he wished she draw him into a hug, since he certainly couldn’t initiate one himself. He really liked her hugs. If he were honest with himself, he really liked her. But that was something he’d never say to her. Ron liked her, and she appeared to like him. That put him so deep into musing that he almost missed her next words, “No Harry, nothing’s wrong really. Just I wanted to . . . thank you,” she said, again sounding hesitant. “I was sometimes aware while I was petrified Harry. I know you spent all those hours with me, sometimes with Ron, sometimes not. I was scared that I’d never be unpetrified, but you gave me peace.

Harry gulped at that statement as he remembered what all he told her. For the most part the topics were completely safe and innocent, but there were a couple of times when he broke down and cried on her. Those times he was at his most vulnerable, and one night he finally told her how he felt, and promised her whatever she wanted if only she’d wake up. It was the only time Madam Pomfrey actually came

out during one of his visits, and even then it was only to give him a calming draught. “Er . . . you’re welcome Hermione. I’d do anything for you, you know that.”

Hermione smiled widely at this comment and drew him into a close hug. She even went so far as to kiss him on the cheek before saying, “Harry James Potter, I like you to. I thank Merlin I met you, and that we became friends. You are very important to me and one of the greatest fears I had while I was petrified was that you would die while I couldn’t save you because I was petrified.”

Harry’s arms hesitantly went around her in response, and he slowly started to raise his hand up her back to run it through her hair. Just then he heard someone clearing his throat, causing them both to jump apart. Harry felt something. It was very strong and really wanted bare skin contact with some part of her right then. But now there was someone in the hall. Not only someone but Dumbledore no less.

“Harry, Miss Granger, how are you doing this evening?” the old man asked with his trademark grandfatherly smile.

“Nothing Professor, just having a talk in the hallway. We were on our way to the Common Room,” Harry replied rather innocently.

“Ah . . . I see. I’m confused as to why you left the celebration early, Harry. Didn’t you want to celebrate Hagrid’s release?” The man seemed to be peering down deep into Harry’s eyes, making him slightly uncomfortable. But quickly he shook it off and smiled back at the Headmaster, “Actually sir, I don’t like to be the center of attention, and would rather just relax in the common room. Hagrid knows and understands.”

A sad look crossed the old man’s face as he shook his head. “Harry, you should really make an effort to let yourself be known. They only want to thank you, and running away like this makes you appear ungrateful. And think of what would happen to Miss Granger if someone thought you were running away to spend time with her, Harry. There would be quite a few people that would take offense to that.”

It was as if a rod of solid iron fused itself with Harry's spine as he stood straight up, "Frankly sir, I don't care what they think. I care for Hermione a great deal. She's my closest friend. I like her a lot and if anyone has a problem with that they are welcome to talk to me about it."

Dumbledore's face seemed to shut down, with all emotion draining from it and his lips disappearing. "I'm sorry Harry," he replied even though he didn't really sound sorry. "Obliviate."

—End Flashback 1—

Harry howled in anger and pain as the memory ended. How dare he? The old man stopped them from getting together as early as second year. They could have had so much more time together, and the problems with Luna being involved with both of them would have been much easier to deal with. He could have had a family all this time. Luna . . .

—Flashback 2—

Harry dragged his trunk from where it was onto the train, really not looking forward to his return to the Dursleys. For the second year running he had to put his life on the line, and for the second year running he was attacked by a Defense teacher. To make matters worse, his head felt funny, as if there was something wrong or missing. And whenever he looked at Hermione that feeling would get worse. But he knew it wasn't her fault, it was something else. Almost as if there was something left unsaid. That thought seemed to trigger something further in his mind, causing him to freeze right where he was. Suddenly something bumped into him from behind, knocking him over. Both Ron and Hermione failed to notice, and were climbing the steps onto the train.

Harry turned over to look at whoever ran into him and was shocked into incomprehension for a moment. Nearly on top of him was a blond angel with slightly bulgy eyes and a spacey expression. But even with the expression he knew she saw more in a glance than most people

would see in years. "Excuse me," the girl on top of him said with a concerned look on her face. "You aren't being attacked by wrackspurts, are you?"

Harry shook his head violently to clear the cobwebs from them before answering, "Wrackspurts?" Yeah, that sounded really intelligent. Quickly he tried to gather himself in an effort to save his image in front of the blond miniature goddess. "I mean, no, no wrackspurts here, at least as far as I know of. I feel a big fuzzy headed, but that's about it."

This apparently was the wrong thing to say as the girl in front of him started to reach for his forehead, "Oh dear, you might have a really bad infestation then. Do you feel dizzy? How many of me do you see?"

Harry scrambled back in partial panic, though why he did not know. "NO!" he said a little more forcefully than intended. Seeing her draw her arm back with a hurt expression caused his heart plummet to somewhere around the earth's core. Quickly he tried once again to save himself, "I'm sorry, it's not you. My shoulder hurts from where I fell and you were about to put pressure on it," he said quickly, then sighed a breath of relief when the hurt look went away. "But no, there's no dizziness. It's more a fuzzy feeling, like I've . . . I've forgotten something. Important. It involves a friend of mine, but I'm not sure what it is. It's on the tip of my tongue, and I can't . . ."

Just then the girl put her hand on his forehead, and an electric shock ran through both of them, even effecting the scar which exploded briefly with pain. Harry nearly cried before settling down and opening his eyes. The angel before him seemed to start glowing! He could feel her in him! For the first time in a long time he felt love. Wait . . . That couldn't be right. He recognized this feeling from somewhere. But where? Then, as if a nova exploded in the back of his mind he knew.

"Hermione!" both Harry and the blond angel exclaimed at the exact same moment.

It barely registered that this girl he didn't even know seemed to know his innermost thoughts, but even that small part that seemed to not to mind at all. It felt natural. It was confusing, especially considering what he felt about Hermione, but even that was but a small consideration. In fact, in the feelings he could feel from her he knew she was feeling something similar. And somehow in a way he didn't even begin to comprehend he knew the angel's name. "Come on Luna, we need to go. She could be in trouble."

Luna had already seen what Harry was thinking, and apparently didn't want to waste time either. "You're right, let's go. Harry, we need to . . ."

The both of them almost ran into yet another person, and perhaps the last person Harry wanted to see. In front of him stood Albus Dumbledore, and his face did not look good. Harry knew that face though, it was from just before he cast that spell on him that made him forget. Suddenly Harry wasn't feeling very close to the old man he had started to think of as a grandfather. No. In fact, he was feeling very much angry at the man, and more than a little fearful.

"I'm sorry sir, we didn't mean to run into you. Can we please be excused?" Harry asked in what he hoped was his most innocent voice. He didn't want to trigger any more of the man's ire, for if he could remove a memory the first time, what would he do now?

"Don't worry Harry, I've had plenty of people run into me, I'm fine," he said rather jovially. Harry opted to take this as an affirmation of his request, and started to go around the old man. Even so, he kept an eye on him for he no longer trusted him, and he knew that he was the danger to Hermione.

Dumbledore had other plans however, and decided to implement them the moment they were past him and starting to head up the train steps. "Effrego vinculum," the old man said. Both Luna and Harry stopped dead in their tracks as if petrified, and fell backwards on top of each other. Harry once again felt fuzzy, but this time he also felt dizzy. He also discovered that he was getting weaker, as if he was

losing energy. He looked toward Luna, who by some miracle had managed not only to get out from him but was standing up with her wand drawn at him.

“No,” she said defiantly. All vestiges of blank expression was gone, replaced with a fierce look of determination. “I will not let you break this bond, Dumbledore. You are not a god, you do not have the right to make such a decision.” Normally one would not think a first year, even one who had just completed her first year, could do anything against someone of Dumbledore’s caliber. But as she proved within the next couple of minutes, such broad statements were not to be uttered lightly. She quickly proved herself to be a formidable opponent, using her own house spells in terrifyingly unpredictable ways. For the first time in a while, Dumbledore was actually having to work for this, and Harry could tell with what small part of himself wasn’t fighting his inner battle that he was not amused. Finally Luna slipped and Dumbledore managed to catch her with a stunner.

By that time Harry was standing up, despite the inner battle he was fighting, with his own wand in his hand. “No, I will not let you hurt her,” he said with as much of a determined voice as he could muster. Harry knew that even though he could beat Voldemort, in his current condition he didn’t have much of a chance. But he would fight anyways. Maybe someone would come and help.

Dumbledore sighed deeply before turning to Harry and asking, “Why does everyone fight me so much? Can’t you all see I’m working for the Greater Good? I’m sorry Harry, but neither Hermione nor Luna are good enough for you. You need someone else.” With those words Harry saw red before slipped into unconsciousness.

—End Flashback 2—

Dozens more memories ran through the trio’s mind, and with each one they became more and more angry. Even Luna, who was usually the most calm and serene of the group felt so enraged she could tear the Headmaster apart with her bare hands. The visions weren’t only of Dumbledore manipulating them and stealing their lives. Oh no. Harry had decided to break the memory blocks he himself had

imposed. The scenes were mostly from his time “home” at the Dursleys, and by the time the last one played through Hermione could not help but to wretch. Harry knew then how lucky he was to be alive, and how lucky he was to be loved by these two. And just as in one of those self-imposed memory blocks Snape had sworn, so did Harry now. Snape, Dumbledore, and the Dursleys would pay for what they had done. Each was guilty of not only stealing his childhood, but in their own ways of child abuse so dire it almost seemed as if Dumbledore wanted Harry to die. Dumbledore never raised a finger physically, but Harry had lost count of the spells the old man had cast on him and others because of him. No, they would face justice, this Harry swore.

Chapter 9: Hard Truths and Tough Decisions

Room of Requirement

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

June 9, 1976

Ginny's POV

Ginny watched as Neville and Ron faced off against 5 practice dummies and frowned. She herself had been working long hard hours improving her skills in Defense, thanks mainly to the romantic trio, who were not here. But she knew better than to suggest they take it easy until they showed, for the three of them had been very driven since that fateful attack on McGonagall. The way they pushed themselves, as well as her and the other two, would be frightening to any who could see them. But not even James and the rest of the Marauders knew they were meeting here, or what they were doing.

Indeed, to the rest of the school the Ravenshire Survivors might as well have dropped off the face of the earth, or at least the Hogwarts map. They waited just long enough for McGonagall to return before disappearing during their free hours, though it was more by sheer dumb luck than design. No, those four days that McGonagall were gone the group of them were rather obvious about their location: the married quarters of Gryffindor. But even though everyone knew where the six of them were, no one outside of them and Charles Potter knew what was going on inside the room. The portraits in the room were silenced and put behind magical covers that made the pictures think the group of them were working on harmless research. They were in fact heavily in research, research that some could say was the result of their efforts to calm the trio down.

Ginny shuddered involuntarily as she thought about those first few days. The three of them had walked into the trio's common room to find them all pacing, literally red with anger and vibrating. She couldn't believe her eyes. Harry had a temper, even though she could never fault him for it considering what all he has had to face. Hermione often had bouts of righteous indignation, mostly over other people's study habits or some injustice or another. But those periods

of righteousness had nothing on the way she looked those first few days. Never had Hermione looked so barely in control.

But the most awe-inspiring and fear-inducing person of that time was Luna. To Ginny's knowledge, Luna never let things get her enraged. She only very rarely showed when things hurt her, and even then you had to know her very well to see it. But Luna, of all people, looked ready to kill. Whatever it was the three of them found out, it must have been bad. In fact, under most circumstances she would have felt sorry for the person they were targeting. But when she learned what had gotten them so angry, she just shook her head and stood back. She could still remember the conversation they had on the topic, and how close they came to seriously mucking up the time stream. If Ron, Neville, and she hadn't been able to talk some sense into them, Dumbledore would have had reason to fear for his life.

Later Neville told her that he felt like a mouse in a big wide-open field when he walked into that room and saw them. Which amazingly enough echoed her feelings almost exactly. But at the time neither one of them could afford to back out and let the trio have their peace. But they were at a loss as to what to say either, and so the tension mounted even higher. That was until Ron, the stupid but lovable brother of hers, proved just why he was sorted into Gryffindor in the first place. Ginny wanted to find a place to hide, instead she settled for jumping into Neville's side and curling into him when Ron asked them if they were all crazy. The look of utter fury in the trio's faces made Ginny feel certain that she was about to lose her brother.

But Ron stood firm in face of the glares he was receiving, almost as if daring them to do their worst. But they didn't yell. Instead they did something much worse: they talked in cold, hard voices as they explained in small words a five year old could understand exactly why the old man had to die. Ron winced at both the tones and the wording of the trio's points, but still managed to hold firm despite the coldness of the tongue-lashing he was receiving. Ginny herself was in tears from what she heard with grief augmented by the knowledge her family was one of the old man's biggest supporters. There was no doubt the man had to pay, but she knew in the end it would be going against some of her own family to do so. Ron, in a very atypical moment of empathy, looked like he was very much near tears himself,

but still stood firm. He then started to use his more Slytherin side as he led them intellectually back to the point he had tried to make earlier.

Ginny would never have thought it possible of Ron to be able to out-think Luna, much less Hermione and even to a certain extent Harry. The three of them together were a force to be reckoned with. Even the apparent weakest intellectual link, Harry, was far from unintelligent. And Ron was never known for his own intellectual prowess outside of chess and recently history. But the young man that stood before them was determined as he started chipping away at their arguments. It became readily obvious to anyone listening that he was all in favor of making the Headmaster pay, but his arguments were more about when and how than if. Neville soon joined him a few minutes later, but it was equally plain to see he was taking his cues from her brother. After watching for a few more moments Ginny herself took a couple of steps forward to aid her boyfriend and her brother.

But the trio were not easy to convince by any stretch. The argument between the six spanned not hours but days, causing a temporary but visible rift between the two groups. The rift wasn't even that large, but it was enough for the rest of the school, including the Marauders and Professor Dumbledore to notice. Even McGonagall's return a few days later wasn't enough to fully distract the man from the argument. No one outside of them knew what the arguments were about, but it was obvious they had the old man's attention when Ginny was called, alone, to his office. This was the first time her own Occlumency shields came under the close scrutiny of the old man, even if it were more token and automatic than anything else. Dumbledore had apparently learned caution after the Sorting incident, for the probe was subtle and didn't last long after the initial contact. She wished she could have said the same for the verbal discussion however. By the end of the talk she felt like she had been dueling for several hours, even if the talk itself lasted for only twenty minutes. She had left the office both relieved and worried. She was relieved that he didn't get anything of importance from her, but at the same time she was worried at how closely the man was scrutinizing everything concerning them.

A short while later she was with the rest of her team and reporting what had just happened. This seemed to steel the trio's resolve, only to be shaken a moment later by Neville's point, "And what will silencing him right now do? All it will do is point fingers directly at us. He's not being too circumspect about his attentions, and it would be far too easy to say that he was right. Besides, if we kill him now, I'm almost willing to bet that V- v- Voldemort would invade Hogwarts the very next day. Our parents are here, they would be killed." This caught Luna's attention as she confirmed what Neville was saying. Ron then asked Hermione to check the arithmancy for killing Dumbledore. Harry himself looked mutinous but thoughtful. A few days later both women looked rather pale as they double-checked each other. The entire argument seemed to fizzle and die, to be replaced with planning to do the few things they could do.

A low-level prank war began shortly thereafter under the guise of retaliation against the Marauders. Harry's father seemed to take the pranks in good humor and competition, even when they got "credit" for some of the pranks the trio were pulling. Dumbledore's image had suffered serious blows in James Potter's eyes, after all. Too many problems had arisen with the team's entrance into school had caused the lead marauder's eyes to open. James himself confided he never thought about how much favoritism the staff showed until he was forced to stand up against it. Oh, they couldn't give him the real reasons behind their actions, but that never seemed to be a problem with the borderline oppression the six suffered at the hands of the staff. Their only open allies on the staff seemed to be Flitwick and Sprout. The latter was relatively new at this time, and thus didn't have much power. Flitwick on the other hand openly supported Hermione, and often acted as a buffer between the six and the staff. Even Slughorn seemed to be against them in his own way, though after years of being under Snape Slughorn seemed to be a rank amateur. Thus a series of small but annoying pranks were unleashed against the entire staff and many times against the school. The pranks seemed minor annoyances at best to the general public, but they were all aimed at the weak points of the staff's emotional armor. Anything with goats was the most favorite of the group, as those invariably hit Dumbledore the hardest.

The group also spent a significant amount of time finding each founder's private areas. Not surprisingly Ravenclaws was soon found near the library, though it took Ginny by surprise when she found out who was her heir. Hermione always seemed to belong to Ravenclaw, even if she had a streak of courage easily as big as her depth of knowledge, but Ginny would never have thought that the first generation witch could be related to one of the founders. It soon came apparent however that Hermione wasn't first generation, instead she was the product of a long line of witches who married into the muggle world after a multi-generation curse was cast on their line. The curse would bind the magic of the witch as soon as they were born provided they were born naturally. And given the line from Ravenclaw had a rather easy time of child birth their own bodies perpetuated the curse. Hermione blushed upon learning this and later explained to Ginny and Luna that she was born early when her mother got into a car accident in her last trimester. And since Hermione wasn't born naturally, the curse broke with her.

This of course led to the witch in question asking a question that no one had been able to answer yet: was the curse broken only for her, or was it broken for the entire line? Was she able to have magical children outside of operations, or would she have to find a way to break it? Even the Unspeakable Medical Staff could not answer those questions, at least not without a lot more research into the nature of the spell. Thus Hermione seemed to have yet another project to answer, one that left her in tears some nights. Harry and Luna did their best to support her during these crying jags, with Harry reassuring her the most that he would love any child she had, no matter what, which often led her to cry harder on his shoulder. At first Harry almost panicked when she did this, but Luna's mental re-assurances seemed to settle him down. Now he just had this amused look on his face when she did this as he continued to make supportive, soothing noises.

Hufflepuff's private area seemed to take the longest to find, even if in retrospect that should have been the most obvious room of them all. The entrance to Hufflepuff's chambers itself was located behind the last painting in the hallway leading to the exit to the greenhouses. Behind the portrait of a farm there was a set of stairs leading down, then out under the grounds. The stairs finally ended at an under-

ground chamber attached to a large underground Arboretum. From the look on her boyfriend's face, he had died and gone to heaven when he saw that. The chambers contained a library of books written by Helga Hufflepuff which Ginny personally thought would forever change people's opinions of the four founders if even half of the things they found out would be made public.

For one thing, Hufflepuff's house was always looked upon as a house of duffers and inferior wizards. This was not correct. The house's focus on hard work meant that even though they had more support roles than any other house, they were often more well informed. This was apparently never more proven than the house's founder: Helga Hufflepuff. It was well known that Helga was the more botanical-oriented of the founders, but what very few people knew was that she was the person who developed the Whomping Willow. It was not a naturally occurring plant like most thought. Instead it was engineered as a kind of living sentinel plant by Helga herself when the Founders needed some way to guard important places. This of course begged the question of what they needed to guard and where that first tree was, but none of her journals gave any indication beyond the first part of a riddle in the back of one of the books.

This gave the trio, and by extension the rest of them as well, something else to focus on besides pranking the staff. Which was a good thing considering the staff was getting closer to finding the real culprits of the systemic pranking. So by unspoken agreement they backed off of the professors and started to work on this newest mystery. Harry once again started to read through the journals left by Godric, while Hermione continued her studies of Ravenclaw's journals. To her mind though the toughest assignment fell to Ron and her: The Chamber of Secrets. Ron itched to destroy the basilisk as much as Harry was with Dumbledore. And Ginny had many ghosts down there that she had to face to help her brother.

The first time the brother and sister went into the Chamber, the ghosts of her memories were so bad she had spent the next few nights with screaming nightmares. Finally they had to go the school nurse to get some Dreamless Sleep Potions, sitting dreams about Ravenshire. It was made worse because they had to interact with the basilisk in order to reach Salazar's private library, the entrance of

which was located behind the statue's mouth. After the first time though it became a little easier to deal with the snake because Salazar's painting would order it back when the mouth opened. This was the only service the painting would offer though, as Ron still had not faced down the last descendant of the Gaunt line. Thus Ginny and Ron both had to spend hours pouring over the library to find the one journal they needed. It had taken them a couple of months to find it, all things considered, and another month to decipher the parselscript the journal was written. Parselscript did not lend itself to riddles, but it was obvious that Salazar was a veritable genius as he somehow managed it. Just yesterday they finally got the passage they found translated into English. They of course notified Harry the moment they were done, and he had called them all to meet today.

Truth be known the six of them were ready for their end of year exams by simple virtue of spending so much time investigating the Founders. Ron was already beyond N.E.W.T.'s in history quite easily, as well as Charms and Defense. And he was the least prepared of the group. Their research was intensive and seemed to re-enforce and expound upon the material they were learning in class. So mostly they mostly needed to keep up in practice and they would pass their course with ease. This mollified Hermione's anxiety greatly, even though what they were studying was more important than school work could ever be. Even Hermione had to admit that, considering she had spent as much time as possible studying the runic array above the main doors to Hogwarts as she did on Ravenclaw's journals.

As if the thought summoned the person, the doors to the Room of Requirement opened to admit Hermione, followed by Harry then by Luna. Neville and Ron finished their last exercises to start stretching while Luna set up a few sets of chalkboards. Hermione cast a spell and the notes that the group had made appeared on three of them, filling them to capacity. A circle of sofas appeared once Hermione was done filling the chalk boards. Neville and Ron finished their stretching and moved over to sit in their places. Harry flicked his wand and the chalkboard with the riddle rotated to the front. After receiving silent confirmation that she and Ron had the floor she got up to start writing the interpreted portion of the riddle on the board. Ron in the meantime stood up and said, "We finally managed to finish

the translation of Salazar's portion of the riddle. Ginny's writing it on the board now, though neither one of us could figure out what it means on its own."

Ginny finished writing and stood up to look at the complete riddle:

Past the town of the drunken sowe,
On the lee of the hill of light,
The lea of summer spreads far.

Within the forest of the wild,
In the center of the fair glen,
A single tree sheds tears of doom.

Above the lake of obsidian
Stands a castle of stone with a place
Where all four seasons last forever.

Three points point contrary a fourth,
Where the secrets of time itself live,
Twice from others as from each other.

To find me and set me free,
Balance between us you must be.
Beware the faces of seeming innocence.

Ginny finally shrugged and sat down next to Neville. "Some of that seems easy enough, while some of it seems pretty difficult. Is it me or does it seem we have to find each of the three places to find the fourth? And the last three lines . . . I think all four of the heirs are needed?"

Hermione seemed to consider the entire riddle for a few moments then answered, "I think the assumption that all four Heirs being needed is pretty much a surety. Also I think we need to take a look at where each section was found. The first stanza was Godric's. At first glance, that's one of the easiest to decipher. Drunken Sowe is Hogsmeade. The lee of the hill of light throws me though, since the town's to the south?"

Harry chuckled for a moment, then walked over to the empty chalkboard to draw a map. "Actually, I know exactly where that is. On one of my nighttime flights I came across a hill just like this one. It's about an hour's flight south of Hogsmeade, and on the west side there's a small area of grass plains. Even in winter it's warm and snow free. There's some rather substantial wards surrounding the area that keeps even the weather out. It looks like a valley stuck in summertime. It takes another hour just to fly from one end to the other, and has a pond in its center."

Hermione blinked and looked shocked. "That's not on the maps . . ." she blurted out. Luna stood up and tapped her on the back of the head, which seemed to snap Hermione out of her shock, "Of course, unplotable and probably warded to admit only certain people. Maybe only decedents of Godric Gryffindor." Her face seemed to light up in understanding as she took a look at the second stanza before she started to think aloud. "The second was Rowena's stanza, and obviously means a clearing in the Forbidden Forest. Obviously it was not as forbidden back then. It obviously refers to a clearing within the forest, but . . ." She then turned toward Luna, her eyes asking the question she couldn't form words around.

"Yes Hermione, there's a clearing within the forest that can be described in that way. It's the Faerie court clearing. It's currently east-southeast of us, about an hour's flight away." With this she got up and drew both Hogwarts and a forest, then drew a circle in the forest. The chalk board seemed to shimmer as if substantial magic was fighting the drawings. "Now that's interesting"

Harry got up and took Luna's hand in one hand while resting his hand on his drawing. Luna smiled and without verbal words placed her hand on the place she had drawn. Magic filled the room as the two started to cast spells silently and wandlessly. Ginny sat there in awe as magic started to bend toward their wills. Finally the board stopped shimmering and simply glowed for a short while. She had to cover her eyes it was so bright. Finally the glow died and both the trio, whose hands were now linked, stepped back. The drawings had changed, becoming more . . . real. "Apparently Rowena had some contact with the Faeries," Luna said mystically. Hermione blushed slightly at this, which caused Luna to softly but musically laugh while standing up to

give Hermione with a feather light kiss. Hermione blushed even deeper, then shivered violently once. "N-n-neville, I think you have the next stanza?"

Ginny noticed Neville was obviously very much amused by Luna's and Hermione's interaction as he stood up to take the chalk. "Well, Helga's in light of everything else is a bit easy. The lake of obsidian is the Black Lake, and if you look at a map Hogwarts is above it. Above that were the greenhouses before they got moved." While explaining this Neville crudely drew out four greenhouses on cardinal points, then placed his hand on the drawing and poured his magic into it. Ginny still held some amazement for how far the six of them had progressed. Each of them could now cast spells without speaking them for the most part, and simple spells were easily done without wands. It was still awe-inspiring sometimes.

Ginny had to shrug it off though to bring everything back into order. She was the one in charge of coordinating the riddle's solution after all. "So, anyone have any ideas what Salazar's stanzas mean?" The group fell silent to this as the last six lines of the riddle seemed to almost pulse. The magic tying the map together to plot what was normally unplotable had tied the riddle into it, so the places on the map matched color to the pieces of the riddle they were referenced by. This left the last six lines pulsing white while the blank spaces on the chalk board all seemed to grow darker.

"Well, the meaning of the last three are pretty clear to me. So far we've had each of the Heirs solve the pieces of the riddle that their ancestors wrote, or were at least instrumental to solving them. This would indicate that to solve the entire thing each Heir must contribute. I kind of also think that maybe we can't retrieve whatever it is ourselves, that we have to work together once we know where we're going to find it?" Ron's eyebrows were furrowed deep in thought as he spoke. It was obvious to Ginny that he was uncertain if he could even solve his portion, but that he was certain he had the rest right. "I can't make heads or tails out of the rest though. I mean what the heck is contrary doing in that line? Everything else would fit."

Ginny took a closer look at the line in question as she re-read the stanza that contained it. "Contrary . . . different . . . opposing . . ."

“OPPOSITE!” Ron yelled as he stood up. “Take the stanza in the opposite way. If the three points point to in a direction, then we go the opposite way! But how do we tell how far?” He started to try to think hard, as if trying to remember something. “Hermione, do the muggles have anything that can help with that?” he asked as he approached the board. He looked closely at it for a moment before taking the chalk and connecting each of the three places in a triangle. “There’s the arrow, so we go in the other direction, but how far?”

Hermione stood up and walked to the board for a moment while she bit her lower lip in concentration. Ginny could almost see the gears turning in her head as she thought things through. “Let’s see . . . You can make this triangle into two 90 degree triangles by drawing a line here, then we can calculate the length of that line by the Pythagorean theorem. We double that and end up here. Or we can add up the lengths of each leg of the triangle, then head in that direction for that distance. The problem here is where is the starting point. Given that we’re dealing with pureblood wizards and witches, the simplest way would be the best, so I’d say adding up all of the distances and going toward the point of the arrow.”

“But that would put it in another lake,” Neville said as he opened a map the room provided. “What’s more, that’s a muggle lake, and it is well known what is there. That can’t be right.”

“Besides Hermione, I think we missed the most simple solution of them all,” Ron said. “I mean, I was confused with the Python what it you were talking about, but what if we did this?” Carefully Ron drew the opposite triangle in, then drew another triangle on top of it so the base was balanced by the point of the arrow. “Neville mate, what’s there?”

“Another clearing in the forest,” Luna answered. “I remember seeing it while practicing flying.” Neville nodded in agreement with Luna as she continued. “But I couldn’t see past the boundary of the clearing. It was almost as if there was something blocking my site. I think that is what we’re looking for.”

Harry blinked as he realized just what this thing meant. "Guys, it appears as if we're going out hunting tonight, at least to verify the distances. We also need to put in an appearance before we go, and probably let Gnome know that we'll be on mission for a while." He seemed to pause for a moment before saying, "We'll head there on Saturday. Tomorrow we'll have something else to watch and keep track of."

"What's that mate?" Ron asked almost without thought. Ginny noticed Harry looked grim, as if whatever he was thinking about did not sit well. Ron seemed to catch on to it pretty quick, which surprised her only slightly, as he gave his friend a concerned frown shortly after.

"Something that must happen, that I really wish it hadn't. Tomorrow's Defense Owls, and a confrontation between Severus and James," Harry answered without inflection. Ginny watched Hermione and Luna reach over to give him some comfort as thoughts raged through Ginny's head. This did not bode well. Given the animosity Severus held for James, and vice versa, tomorrow promised to be really ugly. She just hoped Harry wouldn't commit Fratricide.

Hogwarts Grounds
Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry
June 10, 1976
Harry's POV

The hunt was only mildly interesting, with the only thing that they could verify was the valley was there. There were wards surrounding the clearing which prevented them from seeing in, and Hermione figured out (mainly by Ginny's reaction to the clearing) that if you weren't either an Heir or bound to an heir you wouldn't see the clearing at all. This meant they would have to approach it on Saturday from a Curse Breaker's point of view, and hope they could find the right set of keys to get past the wards. Hopefully getting in would be easier than what he was about to face.

The group had all placed themselves in strategic positions around where the O.W.L. students took their breaks. Harry had made sure

each of them knew what was about to happen, and that they could do nothing to interfere until the time was right, which was not going to be easy for any of them. Even though each member of the team had bad experiences with Snape, none of them were looking forward to standing by and watching today's events unfold. It wasn't that they had a great amount of sympathy for Snape, given that he was as great a bully now as he was in the future, but they did not want Lily to get hurt. She had been rather nice to the entire group, Ron and Ginny included, since shortly after the Hogwarts Express incident. They all knew how this was likely to hurt her, and as a group they wished they could spare her that pain.

But it was not meant to be. Harry had to explain to them that this incident caused James to really start to grow up, which allowed James and Lily to hook up and eventually marry. He was supported by Luna who explained that in the realities that this event didn't take place, Lily would marry Severus, and the world would have been much worse off. But even that didn't make things easier for Harry. He didn't want to see James be the bully in this case. He had had more than his share of bullies in his life, and to see his father act like one was something he really did not think he could handle at all well. Hermione and Luna understood this, and promised to be there for him when this was all over.

Speaking of all over, the Defense O.W.L. exam finally let out, with a bunch of Slytherins and a smattering of other groups out the door first. Harry took a vantage point near where he remembered his father being, but far enough back so he wouldn't be right on top of his father when the time came. Sure enough, his father and the other Marauders were walking in their general direction, talking loudly about the exam and werewolves while James played with a practice snitch. Harry had to shake his head at that. How could they possibly keep Remus's problem secret if they continued to announce it to all and sundry? Finally he heard Sirius proclaim boredom, which was Harry's cue. He moved closer to the tree they were at and listened in as they talked.

"This'll liven you up, Padfoot," said James quietly. "Look who it is..."

Sirius's head turned. He became very still, like a dog that has scented a rabbit.

“Excellent,” he said softly. “Snivellus.”

Severus until this time had followed them out here, but then broke off to sit near within the shadows of a row of bushes. Harry could only tell he was trying to listen in on them, apparently in hopes of finding something he could use against his father and his friends. It was typical of the future potions master, really. Even so, Harry inwardly flinched at the scene unfolding. Oh, the teen from the future practically hated the victim, but watching this was digging up his own memories of the Dursleys, mainly of Dudley. He tried to push those thoughts out of his mind however as the Marauders continued.

Snape was on his feet again, and was stowing the OWL paper in his bag. As he left the shadows of the bushes and set off across the grass, Sirius and James stood up.

Lupin and Wormtail remained sitting. Lupin was still staring down at his book, though his eyes were not moving and a faint frown line had appeared between his eyebrows; Wormtail was looking from Sirius and James to Snape with a look of avid anticipation on his face.

“All right, Snivellus?” said James loudly.

Snape reacted so fast it was as though he had been expecting an attack+, dropping his bag, he plunged his hand inside his robes and his wand was halfway into the air when James shouted, “Expelliarmus!”

Snape's wand flew twelve feet into the air and fell with a little thud in the grass behind him. Sirius let out a bark of laughter.

Harry slowly drew his wand, which was the signal for the others to surreptitiously change their positions so they had a better view of the confrontation. Unfortunately Harry was beginning to have flashbacks to his abuse at the hands of Dudley. He was fighting it, but it began to be a losing battle.

“Impedimenta!” he said, pointing his wand at Snape, who was knocked off his feet halfway through a dive towards his own fallen wand.

Students all around had turned to watch. Some of them had got to their feet and were edging nearer. Some looked apprehensive, others entertained.

Snape lay panting on the ground. James and Sirius advanced on him, wands raised, James glancing over his shoulder at the girls at the water’s edge as he went. Wormtail was on his feet now, watching hungrily, edging around Lupin to get a clearer view.

“How’d the exam go, Snivelly?” said James.

“I was watching him, his nose was touching the parchment,” said Sirius viciously. “There’ll be great grease marks all over it, they won’t be able to read a word.”

Several people watching laughed; Snape was clearly unpopular. Wormtail sniggered shrilly.

Snape was trying to get up, but the jinx was still operating on him; he was struggling, as though bound by invisible ropes.

“You - wait,” he panted, staring up at James with an expression of purest loathing, “you - wait!”

“Wait for what?” said Sirius coolly. “What’re you going to do, Snivelly, wipe your nose on us?”

Snape let out a stream of mixed swear words and hexes, but with his wand ten feet away nothing happened.

“Wash out your mouth,” said James coldly. “Scourgify!”

Pink soap bubbles streamed from Snape’s mouth at once; the froth was covering his lips, making him gag, choking him -

Harry's vision was turning red at this point. The first time he saw this he couldn't help but to feel sorry for Severus. His father and friends were being bullies. They could not deny this, even then. All Sirius and Remus could say was that they were young and foolish, and that Snape had it coming. He had, at that time, compared the situation to him and Draco. Now he knew what they were trying to say, but the scene still did not sit well. Two wrongs do not make a right, and his father was being the bully in this case. Oh, it was a war, and Snape gave as good if not better than he got, but the conditioning of his own past refused to let it go. This was not right. Harry was tempted to step in, but the entire reason they were here for this made itself known before they could do so.

"Leave him ALONE!"

Harry turned to see his mother approach. Her thick red hair was flowing behind her, and her green almond shaped eyes were fairly blazing. She was not happy, and she was about to let James know it. Harry himself gulped, really wanting to leave before he lost control himself.

"All right, Evans?" said James, and the tone of his voice was suddenly pleasant, deeper, more mature.

"Leave him alone," Lily repeated. She was looking at James with every sign of great dislike.

"What's he done to you?"

"Well," said James, appearing to deliberate the point, "it's more the fact that he exists, if you know what I mean..."

Many of the surrounding students laughed, Sirius and Wormtail included, but Lupin, still apparently intent on his book, didn't, and nor did Lily.

'It's more the fact that he exists . . . ' Harry's body shuddered at this as a faint red film started to cover his vision. Every person who ever

got away with tormenting Harry through life said the exact same thing. He hated that phrase. That his father would say that embarrassed, saddened and enraged him beyond what he would have felt possible. 'It's okay Harry. It's not Draco, your cousin, or Snape saying that about you,' he heard Luna's soothing voice whisper softly in his head. He felt love and support from both Hermione and Luna, and this alone kept him from blowing up at this point.

"You think you're funny," she said coldly. "But you're just an arrogant, bullying toerag, Potter. Leave him alone."

"I will if you go out with me, Evans," said James quickly. "Go on... go out with me and I'll never lay a wand on old Snively again."

Behind him, the Impediment Jinx was wearing off. Snape was beginning to inch towards his fallen wand, spitting out soapsuds as he crawled.

"I wouldn't go out with you if it was a choice between you and the giant squid," said Lily.

"Bad luck, Prongs," said Sirius briskly, and turned back to Snape. "Oy!"

But too late; Snape had directed his wand straight at James; there was a flash of light and a gash appeared on the side of James's face, spattering his robes with blood. James whirled about: a second flash of light later, Snape was hanging upside-down in the air, his robes falling over his head to reveal skinny, pallid legs and a pair of graying underpants.

Many people in the small crowd cheered; Sirius, James and Wormtail roared with laughter.

Lily, whose furious expression had twitched for an instant as though she was going to smile, said, "Let him down!"

"Certainly," said James and he jerked his wand upwards; Snape fell into a crumpled heap on the ground. Disentangling himself from his

robes he got quickly to his feet, wand up, but Sirius said, "Locomotor mortis!" and Snape keeled over again at once, rigid as a board.

"LEAVE HIM ALONE!" Lily shouted. She had her own wand out now. James and Sirius eyed it warily.

"Ah, Evans, don't make me hex you," said James earnestly.

"Take the curse off him, then!"

James sighed deeply, then turned to Snape and muttered the counter-curse.

"There you go," he said, as Snape struggled to his feet. "You're lucky Evans was here, Snivellus —"

"I don't need help from filthy little Mudbloods like her!"

Lily blinked.

Harry very nearly came unglued at this. Too many times of Draco calling Hermione that in their time, combined with Snape's perpetual abuse of her from the same time, left him with almost no tolerance for that word. Now he was hearing Snape use that word against his MOTHER. Harry's vision reddened some more as his body started to shake. He couldn't even feel Luna's hand on shoulder, and Hermione's mental voice barely registered with, 'Let it go Harry. It's okay, she can take care of herself. We don't want to arouse suspicion.'

"Fine," she said coolly. "I won't bother in future. And I'd wash your pants if I were you, Snivellus."

"Apologize to Evans!" James roared at Snape, his wand pointed threateningly at him.

"I don't want you to make him apologize," Lily shouted, rounding on James. "You're as bad as he is."

“What?” yelled James. “I’d NEVER call you a - you-know-what!”

“Messing up your hair because you think it looks cool to look like you’ve just got off your broomstick, showing off with that stupid Snitch, walking down corridors and hexing anyone who annoys you just because you can - I’m surprised your broomstick can get off the ground with that fat head on it. You make me SICK.”

She turned on her heel and hurried away.

“Evans!” James shouted after her. “Hey, EVANS!”

But she didn’t look back.

“What is it with her?” said James, trying and failing to look as though this was a throwaway question of no real importance to him.

“Reading between the lines, I’d say she thinks you’re a bit conceited, mate,” said Sirius.

“Right,” said James, who looked furious now, “right -”

There was another flash of light, and Snape was once again hanging upside-down in the air.

“Who wants to see me take off Snivelly’s pants?” (1)

“EXPELLIARMUS!” Harry’s voice snapped, echoing throughout the clearing. Harry couldn’t tell who he was angrier at right now, James or Snape. But one thing was certain, neither one of them would like what was about to happen next. He only vaguely registered the other three Marauders raise their wands, only to be disarmed by his friends as he walked right up to his father. “I don’t know where you get off at, Potter, but this ends NOW.” Harry’s wand seemed to snap up of its own accord, and Sirius and Pettigrew both found themselves in the same position Snape had just been in. “Petrificus Totalus. Furnunculus,” Harry snapped again, this time pointed at James. “I can’t believe the man that stood up to the faculty’s bullying for us so much would in turn be such a bully himself. But no, you’re so full of

yourself you threaten the woman you think you fancy just because she stood up to stop your bullying. It's no wonder Evans doesn't like you. You're too full of yourself to see past your own nose."

"I said I don't need anyone's help," Snape snapped. "I definitely don't need some arrogant Gryffindor who can't even follow the school rules concerning sleeping quarters to stand up for me."

"Shut up, Snivellus," Harry snarled as his head turned over his shoulder. "You're no better than he is. In fact, I think both of you make quite a pair of opposites. Each too immersed in their own arrogance and pride to see anything else but what they want. You were purposefully following them hoping to find something to use against them, either as verbal bullying or to get them in trouble. Don't try to deny it, I know your type far too well." Hermione quickly silenced Severus at that point in order to keep Harry on target.

"Well, Potter, I think you really screwed the pooch this time. Way to win the woman you want over. Did you take lessons in insensitivity? I'd be surprised if she ever talked to you again," Harry growled toward his father. "I mean, she can't even have a friend without you getting jealous and bullying them. And you wonder why she won't give you the time of day? I've got just two words for you: GROW UP! Maybe if you do you might find yourself to be a decent human being. And maybe, just maybe, Evans will say something nice to you. But don't hold your breath." With this the other Marauders were blasted back a few feet by silent spells, and Severus was petrified by Neville. Harry nodded in satisfaction and stomped off in the same direction as Lily, the rest of his team following behind.

As they approached the castle Lily came into view with Headmaster Dumbledore behind. Lily still didn't look happy, and started to say her piece to Harry. "I don't need anyone, even you, to take care of me, Penwell. What exactly did you think you were doing? It's not your right to discipline other students, you are not a Prefect."

Harry was taken aback by Lily's vehemence and paused, blinking for a moment. Hermione took this opportunity to step forward and defend her boyfriend. "Excuse me, but what happened between Halstead

and James was a family matter. James's father had asked Halstead to watch over James in return for the Potter's protection. Included in that was, and I quote, "the right to slap my son upside the back of his head for being a prat, if necessary." By that right what he did was family business, per those orders. You have no right to interfere in that. Nor do you, Headmaster," she interjected when Dumbledore was about to break in. "Family business is outside the purview of Hogwarts rules, per Hogwarts, a History. You cannot sanction, punish, or even verbally chastise us for what we did. As far as the others? Well, that's up to you, though tradition states if it is handled in family, it is considered over and done by Hogwarts."

Lily blinked at Hermione's vehemence, and her ability to steam roll over anyone to make a point. She rallied though and said, "You are not a Potter, therefore it isn't family business."

With the heat off of him from Lily, he finally had time to recover and speak. His voice was soft toward Lily, even though one could tell he was plenty angry, though not at her. "Actually Miss Evans, you are incorrect. Charles Potter took us all under his family's protection by the old laws. By those laws we have accepted him as our Liege Lord until such time as we finish school. As a result, we are considered, legally, to BE Potters for all familial and legal purposes. So when the Head of House Potter makes a request of us, such as my fiancé has explained, it carries the same weight and responsibility that it would if we were born with the last name of Potter. It's old Pureblood Tradition, actually. In essence, Charles Potter is our House Head." He paused while Lily seemed to process this before he continued on, "Miss Evans, on behalf of the Head of House Potter, I hereby apologize to you for any slight the Scion of House Potter has caused. He has been properly chastised."

Lily spent the next few moments in silence while Headmaster Dumbledore stepped forward, "Mr. Penwell, that may be the case, but your mandate does not cover the attack on Mr. Snape. Do you not think your lack of restraint in cursing Mr. Snape requires correction?"

Harry looked the man in the eyes and felt his probe attempting to subtly intrude into his mind. "No, I do not Professor. I would ask that you cease your mind probe, or I will be legally authorized to respond

to the attack. As far as Mr. Snape, I'm afraid he was not thinking clearly and snarled at me to mind my own business. He had retrieved his wand and was in a dueling stance to curse somebody. Given the volatile situation we were under, it was quite within our rights to prevent him from further escalating the situation. The spell cast on him was the petrification spell, and that will wear off within a short period of time. And the other students involved are in no position to do anything, not with all the witnesses still there. I would think you would be more interested in getting there to break things up than trying to stop me."

Of course Dumbledore could not say a thing against this, no matter how much he wanted to, so instead he shook his head, "10 points off your respective houses for failing to come up with a more peaceful solution. Now if you'll excuse me."

As Dumbledore walked off Lily stood there flabbergasted. "Didn't we just say he had no right to say anything?" she asked curiously. She then shook her head and turned to face Harry. "Mr P . . . Halstead, I'm sorry I snapped at you. I didn't know about those laws, and thought you were just being . . . Well, I'm sorry."

"It's okay Miss Evans," Harry replied, which was quickly echoed by his friends. "I may be a half-blood, but I grew up in the Magical World, and my last school had a rather intensive course in Magical British custom and Laws. You could say I have a leg up even on those purebloods in school a year my senior. If you want, we can give you some tutoring in customs and law. I know you've studied some, but really I think it should be required of all first generation witches and wizards, along with those who are raised non-magically. Just like purebloods should be required to take Muggle Studies, literature, science, and mathematics."

"Now that is an unpopular opinion to have," Lily exclaimed a bit sharply. "Not that I don't agree, but I'd be careful who you say that around, if I were you."

Neville at this point laughed and shook his head. "Actually its slowly gaining ground each day. I may not seem to be out in the open much,

considering how much time I spend with the rest of this group, but I know that at least in Hufflepuff they're taking matters into their own hands, and teaching some of that now. I guess this pureblood," he said while pointing to himself, "Being able to carry on a conversation with a non-magical raised witch with no problem kind of sunk that home. We're getting it out there, bit by bit."

Lily seemed to withdraw into a stance Harry could only describe as introspective for a moment, "I don't think it would work in Gryffindor, not with its sink or swim attitude it applies to the lower years, but can you direct me to someone that could give me some pointers on how to set that up? I can definitely try to get something like that started in my house. Question is finding a Gryffindor Pureblood that isn't a prat," she said the last looking right at Harry, who laughingly shook his head.

"Sorry but no. At least not me. I'm better at exercising my rights than I am teaching them. I'm much better at teaching Defense, as you well know." Harry winked at his mother on that comment, which caused her to blush. "I can read, understand, and apply law well enough to argue a case. But teaching it is another story. But I tell you what, let me work on the great Prat during the summer, and maybe James can teach law."

"I can teach customs, if you prefer. Though some may not want be able to get the nargles out of their heads long enough to learn," Luna piped up almost as if reading the thoughts in his head on it. "I am a pureblood, even if others find me a bit . . . Loony." The entire team couldn't help but choke back giggles at that last. Luna didn't have quite as bad a reputation for being strange as she did in their own time, considering she was a bit more grounded since the Triumvirate Bond became fully recognized. But at the same time she was still seen as somewhat strange and therefore some people avoided her. Only one person tried to torture her, and the fear of Harry was quickly put into her. She left Luna alone soon after.

"Anyone with a problem learning from you can be brought to me," Lily said firmly. While technically a year under them, she was often seen as the Princess of Gryffindor. Only those with a serious death

wish crossed her for long. Unless your name was James Potter of course. Then all bets were off. With Lily and Harry both watching out for Luna, Harry was convinced no one would dare touch her or make her cry. Luna smiled at Harry's private thoughts on that matter, as well as Lily's offer, nodding her head in acceptance.

“Ravenclaw has study groups, though they tend to leave the customs lessons for the beginning of year debates. You learn quite a bit from those, but most Ravenclaws consider themselves above them,” Hermione added. Harry already had to threaten a couple of Ravenclaws who decided to express their feelings about Hermione's living arrangements a bit vehemently. He really hated doing that kind of thing, but after having to block a vanishing spell aimed at her clothes in the Great Hall, he really didn't have much of a choice. “I'll try to work with some of the more moderate Ravens though.”

Everyone turned to the last two people in the group, Ron and Ginny. They looked at each other and after a brief silence said, “What? Any non-pureblood in our house keeps their head down and their mouth shut at all times. I don't know of any first generation, and only one mugg . . . non-magical raised person in the house. He sleeps with multiple wards on his bed, and doesn't spend any more time than necessary in the house dorms. We can try to see what we can find where an underground movement is concerned, and have been to a point. We just now got the young man I mentioned to trust us enough not to get up and move away the moment we sit down near him. So it will be slow going if at all there.”

“Do you have to sleep with wards on your bed?” Lily asked, a bit concerned for people she genuinely liked and were on their way to being friends.

Ginny blushed at the question and nodded. “Yes, we do. We hang around with Gryffindors and blood traitors too much,” she said quietly. Harry growled a little at hearing this, a sentiment echoed inwardly by both of his mates. Luna didn't show much outside, save for a slight narrowing of the eyes. To any that didn't know her however, the expression didn't really change from the dreamy one she normally wore. Ginny did pick up on it however, and smiled at her. “Don't worry,

they're too afraid of us to do anything overt, at least anything out of the usual. With Sn . . . certain people there, my house is not the most welcoming of places."

"Go ahead and say it, because of Severus," Lily interjected sadly. "We used to be childhood friends, but over the years it . . ." She stopped and sobbed lightly as her hands went to her face.

Harry went over and hugged her. This was the first chance he could do so without causing undo concern or notice, so he did. "Miss . . . Lily, it will be okay. While personally I can't see much in Severus, he must have been someone you could count on at one point. I know it hurts, but if you want you can try to use that friendship to save him. But only if you want. I don't think there would be anyone who would blame you, whatever way you decide. I know I won't." It hurt Harry to say this about Snape, but this was his mother and he wanted her happy.

"No," she said as she pulled away. "The Severus I grew up with and the Severus now are two entirely different people. I can forgive just about anything, save betrayal. And calling me . . . that . . . was a betrayal of our friendship. I just can't, not any more."

Hermione and Luna both walked up and hugged both of them tightly, drawing Lily back into Harry's hug for a brief moment. "I understand," Hermione said with Luna's fervent nod. "Snape may be long gone to you, but I think others closer to your house aren't. Give it time, and we'll see where it goes from there."

Lily pulled back from the hug again, and was about to say something when she happened to look back the way they came. "Thank you," she said with a watery smile. "I look forward to talking to you all again, but the Great Prat is coming and I don't want to talk to him right now. Maybe you're right, maybe someday he'll change, but right now . . . I've got to go." With this she smiled at the group once more before walking off toward the Gryffindor dormitory.

"Oy. What are you doing with Evans?" James angry and hurt voice barked.

Harry turned around slowly and with great care he said, "Something you could be doing if you pulled your head out of your arse. She just lost her oldest friend today, thanks to you and your bullying. Perhaps you ought to think of her instead of just yourself." Not giving James another chance to say anything, he turned around and left, the others following close behind.

Forbidden Forest
Scotland
June 12, 1976
Harry's POV

Just after breakfast the next morning the Ministry Six snuck out of Hogwarts and into the forest. Soon after they were in the forest they turned into their animagus forms, and sped on out toward their destination. Professor Flitwick and Lily had been asked to cover for them with a brief explanation of meeting with Charles Potter at the Potter Reserve. This caused a few questions from Lily, all easily answered by the explanation of portkeys set up out of sight from the school. She of course bought this, while Professor Flitwick knew they were out on one of their mission objectives from the future. Just to ensure they were covered they had sent a patronus message to Charles, explaining more about their lead. Thus they were all on their way very shortly.

The trip was fairly uneventful as they managed to avoid the acromantula nest entirely. The centaurs paced them for a while until they were about a half hour from their destination. Then the centaurs stopped and watched them go, though the smell still remained right up until they reached the boundaries of their destination. Once there they all changed back to their human forms save Ginny and Luna. As previously agreed upon, the two of them would keep watch until the Heirs figured out the ward scheme and what was needed to cross it. The best forms for that, obviously was their animal sides. Thus Ginny ran out to the very edge of human perception and found a place to lay while Luna posted herself in a tree, pretending to doze.

Then the rest of the team got to work, slowly looking through and around the boundary, making sure to keep the two animal form witches aware of their location. Neville was the first to find something odd, a large rock that seemed out of place in this area of forest. He quickly called over the other three Heirs so they could look it over really closely. Finally Harry leaned back, looking at the other three. "So? Opinions? Ideas?"

Neville was the first to speak up as he stood up looking from the rock's base. "This stone was set here, it didn't just naturally occur. Most people would not be able to see that, save the stone type itself is something out of Ireland, not Scotland. Also there's a lack of moss or other living things on it, and no insects. Also, no plants grow in direct contact with the stone. The closest corner of the stone seems to just touch the first of the wards. I'd say this is probably a keystone."

Hermione nods her head in agreement before saying, "Given how soil is made, and that it rises over time, you can expect anything bordering the bottom 3 inches of the stone to be covered. But here and here you can see what appears to be man-made holes, or the start of gouges. Not only that, but as Neville said, it's right up against the wards. With wards like this, it shouldn't be. So I would have to agree with Neville, this is the ward stone."

Harry nodded then looked up at Ron. "I remember a spell to see through dirt and such, but it was in that Parseltongue book you have. Did you get to study that one mate?"

Ron of course smiled and began work immediately. Just as soon as he began the group was joined by Fawkes, Hedwig, and Selena (Luna's crumpled-horn-snorkack) as they formed a triangle around the rock. The spell Ron used was long and complex, but finally the dirt around it turned into a transparent mass that could be easily read through. Hermione called out for Ginny, and quickly the other two witches came back, turning into humans as they did. Hermione then spent the next few minutes with her bag, pulling out large tomes of Runes. Ginny joined her in research, which resulted in them rather quickly finding the rune scheme to match up. "Thank goodness for Rowena's rune journal," Hermione stated after they had finished. "If not for that, we'd probably never get this translated. This is a

keystone for the wards. Being Founder's Heirs or bonded to Founders Heirs will enable you to find it and see a few feet in it, while just having the blood will enable you to see the barriers. In order to pass the barrier, all four founder's heirs must be present, and touch the stone at the same time. Then they must announce their names and their Founder House simultaneously, as well as any others they wish to enter with them. The stone will test the blood from the Heirs, and unless the blood matches all four, no one gets in. There's also a rune set to test for mental compulsions, including Imperio. It would be useless to try to force the Heirs to admit you. This was obviously Rowena's test."

Harry nodded and gathered the four Heirs around the stone. Three tries later they managed to match up enough to activate the stone and gain admittance for everyone. The barriers shimmered, then turned clear just before the entire group was sucked into the clearing in a heap. Harry sat up and looked around as the others started to sort themselves out. The clearing was covered in a thick but short grass, with flowers spread out seemingly randomly everywhere. The flowers were mainly daisies, with a few lilies here and there. In the direct center of the clearing a large Whomping Willow grew. This of course made both Ron and Harry nervous as they had faced the Whomping Willow at Hogwarts and wanted no piece of this one. Again they all turned toward Neville, who shrugged and pulled out Helena's journal. "Let's see, to get past this one, the four of us must run up and touch the trunk at the same time. That will open the passage below the tree and stop it from killing us."

"You've got to be kidding me. Run up and touch that thing? It's huge! It will kill us before we get there!"

Harry thought about what Ron said for a moment before an idea popped in his head. He looked at Luna and Ginny again, smiling widely. "Do you think you can distract the tree without getting yourselves hurt?"

The two young women looked at each other, then smiled and shifted into their animal forms. Ginny ran along the ground while Luna took to the sky. It became very obvious that they were covering for each other, for each time one of them got in trouble, the other would

distract the tree and cause it to go after them. Harry waited for a few minutes then shifted himself into his form, tucking in his wings to his side. The other two quickly followed suit and took off, with Neville being slowest. The tree went nuts, trying to get all of them at once, but it proved quite impossible. The four finally made it to the tree, but not before Neville got clipped, sending him rolling sideways. But as a cave bear his mass and toughened skin kept him from getting injured, or even stunned. He rolled back up to his feet, ran away from Ginny the fox and lumbered toward the tree. When he finally arrived they turned back to human form and each touched the tree.

The tree froze immediately, almost causing Luna to crash into a limb. Fortunately she managed to roll out of it at the last moment and dive into the newly forming hole. Harry sighed in relief, and called, "On the count of three we jump for the hole. One . . . Two . . . Three!" Right on three they all jumped and scrambled into the hole. The tree shuddered, as if it were going to move, but then stopped as if frozen again.

The tunnel, which to this point had been dark, was suddenly filled with light as torches flared along the walls. They could not see the end of the tunnel however mainly due to the fact the torches were lit only ten feet ahead. The walls were all smooth, not like carved stone at all, but solidly one piece without cracks. Surprisingly enough there weren't any webs or insects around, nor were there any rodents or signs of any life at all. There wasn't even any signs of ventilation, which looked very strange to Harry as he felt a breeze in the tunnel. "Well, shall we go on then?"

Once they all agreed they started to walk down the tunnel, which quickly sloped downward. Their wands were out, and they were ready for just about anything, or so Harry thought. After about ten minutes of walking the torches stopped automatically lighting in front of them. Harry was the first to notice this, and called for the rest to stop. Harry himself took a few steps forward toward the last set of torches, his wand out and cautious. Suddenly the entire black area ahead was illuminated with a flash, revealing about the biggest dementor Harry had ever seen. Harry stopped and brought up the happiest thought he could (Him, Hermione, and Luna together at Christmas for the first time) and called out "Expecto Patronum!" Instantly a bright white

patronus leaped out and struck at the dementor, only to find it did not give way. "Quick! More patroni!"

Every one of the rest of the team immediately followed suit, each striking the dementor. When Ron's who was closest hit, a wave of spiders flooded out from under the dementor's robes like a great black wave. Then Ginny's struck the patronus, and Tom's diary appeared in front of them, opening up to the words, "Hello Ginevra, I'm Tom." Hermione's brought forth Minerva with a scroll of N.E.W.T.'s reading all "T"'s while she threatened to snap her wand. Luna's patronus generated an image of Cho Chang with Harry at the altar. Harry could see Luna turned white, then start crying. Finally Neville's struck the dementor, and a dead Ginny appeared on the floor, followed by a heart-wrenching scream from Neville. Harry took a step back from all this as he started to hear the memory of his mother begging for Harry's life. He almost stumbled backwards, for this seemed even worse than any dementor he had ever seen. Thinking it was a bogart, he shakingly raised his hand up and cast "Riddikulus!" The dementor flashed for a moment, then disappeared.

Harry was about to call out for the others to do the same when the dementor came back stronger than ever. That was the last thing he saw before he crumpled to the ground, lost in a loop of Voldemort killing his parents. After the third time through he started to hear voices. It was hard at first to understand them, much less who they were, but they grew louder and more sorrowful, until finally he could make out the voices belonging to Hermione and Luna. The vision seemed to grip harder, with the scene changing to include both Cedric's and Sirius's deaths. Those clashed with the voices, and for a moment seemed to drowned them out. But Harry was now holding on to the voices for dear life, and after one more repetition they started to falter. This gave Harry a moment to think, and suddenly a pattern struck in his head. He continued to struggle against the vision, clawing his way back to consciousness bit by bit. Finally he saw the tunnel and all the various forms of fears and gritted his teeth to keep from slipping back. Gritting his teeth, he ground out, "Together, all of us. Bogart banishing charm. On. Three." He felt more than heard Hermione and Luna's return to cognisance and their agreement. Vaguely he saw each of the others start to straighten up, and when Ron finally managed to do so, he ground out, "O-o-one. Two. Three.

RIDDIKULUS!" The tunnel echoed with the word as all of them cast the spell at once.

Suddenly the forms flashed and disappeared, only to be placed with a single Occamy. Ron slowly stood up, looked at Harry, then nodded once. He took a few steps forward and knelt to the snake, holding out his hand before saying in parseltongue, "I am Ronald Weasssley, youngessst ssson of the youngessst ssson, and Heir to the Weasley inheritancce. I assk you for admittencce."

"You mussst be tesssted." the occamy answered. Ron simply kept his hand out, allowing the snake to strike it. He continued to kneel there for a few minutes until the snake spoke again, "You are deffinitely the fortold Weasssley. I can tassste your form. You and your friendsss may passssss."

A door appeared in the door at the end of the tunnel, now lit from the last two tests. Harry walked up to the door and opened it easily, quite convinced the tests were done. When they all entered the room they found it empty save for a life-sized portrait of the Four Founders together. "Who dares enter the private chamber of the Hogwarts Founders!" The speaker was obviously Godric Gryffindor, which in turn prompted Harry to speak. "I do. I am Harry James Potter, Heir to Potter and Gryffindor. At my side is Luna Lovegood, blood of Gryffindor. We each are the last of our lines in our time."

"And what do you mean in your time? Who are these others?" Rowena asked.

"We come from the future, guided by fate, to train and prepare for the defeat of the Dark Lord. I am Hermione Jean Granger, Heiress of Granger and Ravenclaw."

Rowena looked at Hermione with a sad yet hopeful expression, but did not respond as Helga spoke next, "What know you of the Dark Lord? And who else enters this abode?"

Neville, still shaky from the previous chamber, stepped forward to answer, "We know he threatens the world of our time, and must be

stopped. We know the prophecies that we are to find the Children of Time, and bring forth a brighter future. I am Neville Longbottom, Heir to House Longbottom and Hufflepuff.”

Before anyone else could say anything else the image of Salazar Slytherin spoke up, “And do you even have the right Dark Lord, or are you so imbecilic to think the obvious is the answer? Do you have any idea just what you are fighting in the Dark? Do you know of the adaptability of the Dark? And for the last time, Who. Are. You.”

Ron looked at Ginny, smiled, and gestured her forward at the same time he does. “The Dark Lord we speak of is named Tom Morvolo Riddle, Heir to Gaunt, contested of Slytherin. We have fought the Dark before, stood before the ones that serve him, and won. We know how fluid it can be, but the Light is even more so. And lastly, we are Ronald Bilius Weasley, Heir of Weasley, contested of Slytherin. And this is Ginevra Molly Weasley, blood of Weasley.”

At this three of the Founders looked upon the young adults with pity, while forth (Slytherin) sneered. “You do not know enough, young Weasley. Riddle is for you to fight, not the Chosen One. You have been blinded by the Dark, just like the Gaunts.”

“What do you mean by that?” Ginny asked, apparently shocked to the core. Harry could sympathize most heartily, for he was as well.

“One of you already bears the mark of the Dark Lord. He has been his constant victim. The others have been unwitting puppets, blinded by the ambition of the Dark Lord. Remember the tools of the Dark Lord,” Godric answered. “Lies, deceit, pain and suffering. The result is death and destruction. Think carefully my Heir, lest you strike wrongly and fail.”

Harry stood there for several minutes in the quiet room as his life ran through his mind. Surely Tom was the Dark Lord! He killed his parents and so many others. But then he thought of the rest of his life, and how the person to most influence his life for the first ten years wasn't Voldemort. Voldemort was so weak at the time he could do nothing. Even the death eaters had stopped looking for him a month

after Voldemort's fall. But he was not aware of this. Instead he was secluded away with the Dursleys, abused and neglected. He should have died any number of times, but only his magic could save him. Voldemort had nothing to do with that, neither did his death eaters.

Then came his schooling. Everyone around him knew more about him than they should. The Harry Potter dolls were amazingly accurate, and descriptions in books (he found out much later) were scarily accurate. It was as if someone wanted him to be recognizable when he entered the Magical World. No one should have known about his scar, if Dumbledore had done what he had apparently wanted to do: keep him from the Magical World. But yet he was known, and everyone was fawning over him. Everyone save Snape. And yet every time Snape did something that would get any other teacher fired, Dumbledore's answer was "I trust him implicitly." And Harry should never had to face the Voldemort over the Philosopher's Stone. Those protections were a joke, or geared directly for him. It was a set up to allow him to face Voldemort once again.

Yet Harry knew he hated the old man, and was ready to think the worst for him. So he started to think long and hard, pulling Hermione and Luna into his thoughts and asking them for help. Slowly he dissected his life piece by piece, examining each part as they relate to the whole. Hermione played Devil's Advocate while Luna inputted her own observations. Neither one would allow anything so large as a midge to get through. He wasn't aware of a similar, whispered conversation being conducted amongst the others. The Founders remained quiet during all of this until the trio could not come up with any other alternative. Finally Harry looked up and pronounced their verdict. "The Dark Lord is not Tom Riddle, known as Lord Voldemort. He is an unknowing puppet. The real Dark Lord is Albus Brian Percival Wulfric Dumbledore."

"Finally the Gryffindor Heir grows a brain," Salazar states, though there is a brief glimpse of a smile there. Ron and the others seem to deflate when it is confirmed, but Salazar continued, "Heir Weasley, your way to end the line war is clear. The Gaunts were still the puppet of Dumbledore, and it is time to reclaim Slytherin for what it is supposed to be."

“I thought you didn’t take sides,” Ron blurted out, only to be elbowed by his sister.

“Wrong, Heir Weasley. I could not appear to take sides, per the inheritance laws of the day. But I made it plenty clear when I helped set up the inheritance laws of Weasley whom I wanted to win. While the old saying about old age and treachery is most often true, it does not hold true when youth and enthusiasm is combined with knowledge and treachery. For generations the Weasleys played the game of being anti-Slytherin, at my direction. You now know the truth of that deception. Will you let the Gaunts dictate the Slytherin line?”

Ron shook his head, holding it high. “No, I will turn the Slytherin name to what it is meant to be, not to what it is now.”

Rowena spoke up next as a podium faded into view in the middle of the room. “This book is the story of the Dumbledore line and its interactions of the Founders. The Dumbledore line has been Dark since the beginning, always hiding as a light family. Heir Ravenclaw, Heir Gryffindor, it will be your duty to bring this and all other evidence you can find to light. Ravenclaw must attack politically and in the eyes of those who record history. Gryffindor must lead the way, wielding both intellectual and physical might to remove his power base and then to destroy him. Trust not anyone with the Dumbledore name.”

Harry looked into Hermione’s eyes, then held his hand out to her. Once Hermione came up he held his other hand toward Luna, who also stepped forward. “We so pledge,” they said in unison, glowing as they did. Three to become one, three in one to fight two. Harry knew now what he must do, the only questions were how and when.

Helga stepped forward, motioning for Neville to approach. “Heir Hufflepuff, yours is some ways the hardest task. Yours is to record history in fairness. Yours is to consolidate the other magical species of the Realm. Yours is to once again bring cooperation amongst all magical races, and show that your fellow Heirs are working for all people, not just humans. Make people mean all sentient beings again, not just humans.”

Ginny didn't even wait for Neville's gesture, she strode forward and took his head. "I will aid him, as much as I may."

Neville smiled when she said that and kissed her temple before turning back to Helga, "I so swear, so mote it be."

The Four Founders then looked toward the group and spoke one last time. "This world has been divided for far too long. It began even before we built Hogwarts, though we did not wish to be. We charge all of you to re-unite the world again, and bring true peace. Will you accept this charge?"

The six teens joined hands and stood before the portrait. "So you have asked, so shall we do, so mote it be." The glow intensified as the oath was given until finally it encased the room in brightness. The new age of Light had begun.

(1) = Bolded sections are excerpts from Harry Potter and the Order of the Pheonix by J.K. Rowling

Chapter 10: Aftermath of Revelations

Hermione sighed as she gathered up the various notebooks she was using to hold her notes. In just a half hour she and the rest of the teens from the future would be sitting down with Harry's grandfather to discuss everything they uncovered over the school year. It took them a full three weeks after the term ended to work through all their data, much to the chagrin of her grandfather-in-law. Finally Harry informed him they would be ready today, so they set a time to talk "in craft." The team knew the elder man would not like the results of their investigations, so she was thankful the Potter Head at least considered them as family, something that Hermione herself was only too happy to return.

Family. It was something she had initially thought she wouldn't have for at least five years, if she would have that at all after they returned. It saddened her to think she may have lost her parents over this, especially with their attitude when they signed her emancipation paperwork. Jason and the "Future" Harry may not have told her everything, but she was not the smartest witch of her generation for nothing, she could read between the lines. She knew her bridges were all but burnt there. In fact, she dreaded what would happen when she did meet them again. Would they accept her? Would they turn their backs? Would they accept her mates?

That last question had kept her from committing fully to Luna and Harry for most of the school year, though they had been growing closer and closer during that time. She didn't push them away, but at the same time she wanted to take it rather slow. But events conspired against that plan, starting with the train ride to school. Don't get her wrong, she had meant what she told them, about her upbringing and the predominant beliefs of her family indoctrinating her against such relationships. Not that she personally held any strong religious convictions in that regard, but all her values were instilled from her family, which was based upon their beliefs. Facing the concerted effort to end their lives, not to mention separating them, had forced her to cling more tightly to her mates, which helped her relax into the relationship all the more.

Then the memories of her previous years of Hogwarts were restored. Time and time again she witnessed not only Harry and her, but Luna and her as well grow closer and closer. Each time Dumbledore stepped in and attempted to break the bond, obliterating them in the process. These memories did two very important things to her feelings: they pushed her closer to both Luna and Harry, and they destroyed her absolute faith in authority figures. In at least two of those memories, she saw Professor McGonagall's grim and slightly sad face as she helped Dumbledore in his efforts to manipulate them. She had trusted her old head of house, and yet in those memories she saw where that trust was betrayed. It was as if she had almost nowhere left to turn, almost but not quite. Throughout her memories, she began to understand that only Luna and Harry were there for her no matter what.

The obliterations made her feel dirty, used, almost raped. She knew that both Harry and Luna felt the same, which only fed into her own feelings, forming a loop of pain and misery that threatened to drown all three of them. Finally it came out in one of Harry's therapy sessions, and a few days later both Hermione and Luna were asked to submit to sessions of their own. It was a difficult time for Hermione, especially with all the training and such going on, but with the help of her mates and the trio's friends, she was able to work through not only those feelings. Then she and the doctor focused on her own upbringing versus her current situation, and what she not what she should do, but what she wanted to do. After several more painful and nerve wracking sessions she finally decided to stop fighting her feelings for her lovers and submit completely to the bond. And through that bond, she learned she would never be alone again.

Then the Potter/Snape confrontation happened, followed by the trek into the Forbidden Forest. The revelations of the night shocked her, though not quite as much as they could have. Albus had to have been dark, after all. How else could he justify even half of what he had done? How else could he just sit by and watch as race after race fell underneath the heels of the Wizarding population of the world? No true leader of the light could ever stand by without doing something about it. But he didn't do anything except play the forlorn old grandfather, something he did very well. And yet behind the scenes he manipulate circumstances to make the Dark side dance to

his tune, without them ever realizing it. It was fascinating in a sick, twisted way. But at the same time it was incredibly painful to know that her love's family and life were lost to the whims of a Dark Lord that no one knew about, not even his victims.

She cried inside that day, even as she raged against the injustice of it all. She mourned for both her mates and for the childhoods savagely ripped from them. Fate herself tried to intervene, but Dumbledore proved too smart by half, and nearly destroyed their last chance for happiness. But then Fate intervened again, and sent them back here. In the year they were here they discovered so much, not only about the true nature of the world around them but about themselves. Hermione discovered love and unconditional acceptance. She discovered two people who would not only die for her, but live for her as well. That was all the difference. Her other friends would die for her, they each knew this, but it still was not the same as living for the one you love.

The school year had finished with them avoiding Dumbledore completely. On the train home James and the other Marauders were in a different compartment despite objections by her friends that they were welcome. James and Sirius both appeared thoughtful, apparently the verbal slap down they received from Harry was the final push they need to make them stop and think. Goodness knows the professors were happy to get some peace and quiet. Lily, on the other hand, joined them on their way back home. At first things were awkward, but after a half hour of silence Lily apologized for berating them for their help. She then started to ask questions about the WIZARDING Society, and what certain things meant. By the end of the trip, she looked quietly thoughtful but thanked them again not only for their help but for answering her questions. After exchanging addresses, they promised to keep in touch over the summer. James of course was horribly jealous when they left, but Remus kept him from doing anything rash, even if it took reminding him about the O.W.L. Exam fiasco. James calmed down instantly and managed to smile at Lily as she left. Then the boys said their goodbyes and Peter and Remus left, while Sirius and James walked over to the Potter Family for their trip home.

That very day Hermione made her final decision on their relationship, and after a brief moment of thought decided to take matters into her own hands. She stood in front of her mates at the front door and asked the Head of House Potter if the three of them could have one suite as a full triad. Wanting this to be a surprise for her lovers, she had not made any indication of this to the others beforehand, thus shocking everyone, not just Charles. Charles's reaction was a smile and nod toward Hermione before taking Harry off for a private discussion. At the same time Grace took the young witches in another similar direction, leaving their three other friends as well as James and Sirius to sit there alone for a while team. What happened next was more of an interrogation of sorts as Grace dissected not only their knowledge of wizarding customs, but their own hearts. Once she was assured they knew what she had asked for was what they truly wanted, she then turned their attention to the views of the Wizarding World on the matter. She was protective of those she considered family and wanted them all protected from those that would use their relationship to hurt them. The questioning was relatively short considering, but it still took a while.. After an hour they returned to the family room to find James and Sirius in more casual clothes playing gobstones while the Head of House Potter and his grandson sat a little away from them. The game was quickly put up and the mess scourgified, and once again they all took their seats.

Without need for Charles's prompting, Harry stood up and took both of their hands, and asked them to marry him. Hermione instantly said yes, but it took a few minutes before Luna could find the words to accept the offer. Charles nodded and then had the house elves move their belongings to their new bedroom, and shooed them away so they could put "get ready" for supper (which was still a few hours away). They didn't need to be told twice, and after many offers of congratulations from Ginny, Ron, and Neville, they took off for their room to spend some quiet time together. Contrary to popular belief, and much ribbing later, they did not have sex that night, having decided to save themselves for the wedding. Instead they snuggled and enjoyed each other's presence for one night before they had to get to work.

Over the next few weeks they got to know their suite very well, as they and their friends had spent most of their non-class time in their

sitting room. Their suite was both luxurious and functional. The door from the hallway opened into a large sitting room, done in maroon and gold, almost gryffindorish in coloration. The furniture was well padded and soft with a base of solid, well crafted mahogany. The walls were covered in wall hanging rugs that depicted several romantic scenes within. To the left stood a large fireplace with a picture of Charles's father, Charlus with his wife Dorea Potter (nee Black). A large multi-candle crystal chandelier hung from the ceiling, its ever-burning candles illuminating the room very well at night. The chandelier divided the room in half - one side was a large sofa facing a coffee table, a love seat and another single chair; while the other side had three large, old desks that were moved to the shape of a triangle so each one would face the other two. Straight back was another door that led into the bed chamber. The bed chamber itself featured a large ceasar bed with forest green and gold covers. Two elegantly carved mahogany chest of drawers stand against bracketing the bed against both walls, while small but elegant bed-stands sit at the head of the bed. Two other doors in the bedroom open up to a large private bath and a larger walk-in closet. The trio were thankful for the size of all these rooms, for it made three people in one room a lot more comfortable.

Now the team was sitting in the sitting room while waiting to talk with the family. It had been a total of almost a month since Hogwarts let out, and they had not really seen much of the Potters. After verifying that everyone had everything in order, Harry cleared his throat and sent a mental nudge to her. Hermione looked up from her piles of paperwork to look into his green eyes. She sighed again, knowing that there was only one question they had not yet talked about. She really didn't want to discuss it, but she knew it needed to be discussed. Harry gave her a re-assuring smile that almost made her melt before looking up to everyone else. Hermione looked down to cover her nervousness, even if she didn't know why she should feel nervous.

"Okay, so we have everything set up, but there's one more thing to discuss. Should we let James and/or Lily know we're from the future? How much of it can we afford to let them know?" Harry asked the room. Hermione knew it had been hard for him to hide his identity from his parents. He wanted nothing more than validation from them,

which was one of the reasons he tore into James that hard. His father had really let him down that day, even if it was less painful than the first time he had seen it. Still, Hermione would have done anything she could to keep him from having to experience that pain again. In a sign of quiet support, she joined Luna in reaching over to softly brush his arm, even as she gave them both another feather-light touch mentally.

Ron was the first to speak up to ask the question he needed to ask, "Are we considering this to make it easier for us emotionally, or do they have a reason to know?" Hermione could see the look of sympathy on Ron's determined face, and knew he was not asking to be accusatory or maliciously. No, she knew full well why he asked that question.

But before Harry could answer, surprisingly enough Ginny stepped up to answer. "Actually, according to history the Potter head and consort die this summer due to disease. They don't look sick now, but they will get sick sometime. I think James at least will need to know the real reason his father is keeping us here. Not that I think he'll turn his back on his father's word, but still . . . " she shrugged her shoulders in a 'who knows' gesture before taking a seat.

Ron nodded in thought as it was his turn to play devil's advocate. "Then again, his father's word was enough to come to our aid this year. So the reasons behind such shouldn't make that much of a difference, should it?"

Neville was next though as he shook his head. "People can be irrational in grief Ron, and considering how Harry lit into James, he may not be feeling too charitable toward us this time. It would be better if he has a real reason to continue the support." Hermione had to quietly marvel in the changes in Neville. She couldn't help but to remember the small kid that stood up to them to keep them from rescuing the stone, and how he behaved now. Now she would be hard pressed to say that he was the same person as the Neville here. He was much more self-assured now.

“That’s still for our comfort Nev,” Ron said sadly with a shrug. “We have enough to get someplace else if necessary. Remember much of this mission is “in craft.” We can’t just go about divulging the details for no reason. We have to keep our presence low profile, historically speaking.”

“But it won’t be low profile Ronald,” Luna spoke up with a sad smile. “There’s several historical references to Team Gamma in the craft annals. Not only that, but we can’t avoid a fight against either Riddle or Dumbledore forever,” Ron couldn’t do anything other than nod his concession at that point as Luna did indeed have a point. “Not only that, but we’re in a political hot-bed already and it’s drawing James and his group into the fight with each passing day. We have to have something to tell them to justify all the trials ahead of them from their association with us. Especially if James and Lily prove to be the two children we’re looking for.”

Ron blinked at the last part and looked shocked for a few minutes. Hermione looked up and nodded her head in agreement as she put her two bits in, “She’s right. Right now we have a total of three couples who fit all we can deduce from the Founders’ notes on the subject. We’d have four, but Neville’s parents are disqualified based upon historical data.”

Neville looked sad but nodded stiffly in agreement to her statement. “It would be logical to suggest that the children of time would be related to a Founder’s heir. I can see where that makes sense. But wouldn’t your parents and Ron’s parents also be disqualified?”

Luna smiled as Harry remained quiet to gather everyone’s opinions, “Yes, but we’re not counting them. Ronald and Ginevra’s family qualifier is Gideon Prewit. We don’t know if he was seriously involved with someone just before his death, but he was the closest person of his family to die in the time frame we’re looking at.”

Hermione spoke up and said, “My mom has a brother that fits the criteria, though he’s still a blocked wizard. We don’t know what happened to him, he and his wife disappeared shortly before Harry’s parents were killed. They’re my side’s qualifiers. Unfortunately we

know what happened to Neville's side of the family, they didn't die. Thus by the prophecies they're disqualified."

"I'd still like them back," Neville protested grumpily.

"Don't worry hon, we're working on it," Ginny said quietly before kissing him on the cheek. He blushed and murmured something Hermione could not hear to her in response.

"Harry's parents are the most obvious candidates, though it would be a logistical nightmare," Hermione continued on. "They are known to be dead, and there were bodies found. The only reason they are not disqualified is because there's a fifteen minute window where no one was there before the first person showed up after Tom's death. That would be enough to replace the bodies with convincing fakes." Hermione leaned back, looking nervous as she watched Ron consider that. He was good at playing devil's advocate, and he sometimes wound up asking questions that would put them on a track they didn't think of before.

"What about surviving the AK? There's only one person known to have survived that, do you say we have to make that three?" Ron asked, looking between them.

Luna nodded grimly in response, "Yes, that's going to be our second highest priority research project. First being to try to figure out how deeply the Dark Lord has managed to instill himself within society, finding all his family since they are working with him, and figuring out how to neutralize them of course."

"Again that leads to the Potters, for the most obvious answer would be a family spell or trait not accessible to other families. Too many mothers sacrificed themselves for their sons for the blood sacrifice reasoning be real," Hermione pointed out. "As they're the closest match to the Children of Time it would be best to let them know some, but not all, details of who we are and why we're here."

Harry nodded slowly as he took both her hands and Luna's to give them a squeeze. "I agree, we should inform them what is going on.

We need to be careful how much we tell them, and above all we can't tell them anything they'd want to change, but will have to tell them some of what's going on."

Just then a soft 'pop' was heard in the chamber to reveal a house elf. Hermione hadn't seen much of the Potter elves until this summer, and only knew a few of them, so she was surprised when she actually recognized this elf. He looked younger and more fit than she remembered seeing him last, but there was no mistaking this elf's identity. Hedwig and Fawkes both gave the elf a soft trill in greeting, sounding much like a duet in music. She could feel Harry's shock and Luna's surprise in response to this newest revelation so she, and their other friends, watched Harry curiously.

"Dobby?" Harry asked uncertainly. Indeed the house elf looked like a younger version of Dobby, right down to the particular shape of his eyes.

"Yes Master Halstead Penwell sir, I is being Dobby sir. Master Lord Potter is sending Dobby with a mesage, "He is saying he is ready, along with Master James Potter and his Blackie sir."

Harry obviously did not know what to make of this a he turned his head to look at Hermione in confusion. She gave him a confused shrug but decided to answer the poor elf. "Thank you Dobby. Would you tell Lord Potter we will be down in a minute?" When the house elf nodded his head and left, she around at the rest of the group, "We can figure that one out later, we really should be going." Harry smiled, stood up, and then pulled Luna up as well before giving them both one armed hugs and leading them downstairs to the bottom floor.

The future teenagers quickly proceeded down to the ground floor and through a set of double doors that led into the receiving room. This rather richly appointed room was decorated in shades of blue with a fireplace to the left. This fireplace was the only one in the house connected tot he outside floo network, and even it was warded and password protected. The furniture in the room was arranged to face the fireplace, and was crafted in a well-padded French style. A huge chandelier hung from the ceiling to provide light to the room with its

everlasting candles. Finally much of the hard oak floor was covered with a thick woolen rug depicting a scene from the Potter Family Reserve.

Harry led the group in to find not only the Potter Family and Sirius Black, but Professor Flitwick and Jason as well. He nodded to all of them as he strode over to the empty couch where his ladies joined him and waited for everyone to take their places. Of the family, only James and Sirius looked slightly confused as to why they were here, and to who the others he did not know was. A quick mental conversation with Harry caused her unease at Black's presence to ease. At this point and time he had been all but adopted by the Potter family anyway. She gave a small shrug and then with Harry while waiting for the elves to serve tea and biscuits. Once the elves left the entire group chatted for a few minutes before Charles finally set his tea cup down.

“First let me welcome everyone to my home. I think it will go without saying shortly that anything and everything you hear here to night should be kept in the strictest of confidences. No one not currently in this room can know this meeting even took place without Jason's and either my or Halstead's approval.” Charles paused here to make sure everyone understood that before turning to Harry and adding, “Well, I'm not sure why Professor Flitwick is here, Halstead. I thought this was to be a family gathering and discussion. Can you enlighten me?”

James and Sirius both looked even more confused at the family discussion as neither had missed Jason not being referenced as a stranger. Charles also looked at Harry with an inquisitive look, though Harry himself was at a loss as to the Professor's presence. Despite knowing he was here, Hermione still jumped slightly when Jason answered, “He's here at my invitation, Charles. Please forgive me, but after briefly discussing tonight's issues with Halstead, I felt he had a right to know in case things started to go sour.”

Hermione quickly ran through a few time equations in her head at this statement as she was concerned about the ramifications this may have on their history. Finally she came up to a conclusion before sending to Harry, ‘I think it will be okay, Harry. His knowing won't change overly much, especially given some of my talks with him in

my personal past.' Luna also confirmed this, which set Harry's mind at ease enough for him to send them both a mental hug.

"He's fine, Charles. Though I should ask a question. Professor, did Jason tell you what we'd be discussing here tonight?" Harry had laid the meanings on pretty thick, so thick that James seemed to pick up there was another meaning to the words and looked confusedly between both Harry and the Professor. Once Professor Flitwick nodded, Harry seemed to relax a bit before looking up to Charles. "I'll let you start with the introductions, Charles."

Charles returned a nod to Harry before he looked over to his son. "Son, I guarantee that everything we are about to tell you is true. You know there's been some things I've had to keep from you over the years, and sometimes I regret the rift that it caused. Now I can tell you some of the things you've been wondering about all this time. You see, I've told you all along I'm a mind-healer and that I can't talk about the people I treat. And I know you were suspicious when you learned I don't work for St. Mungo's and I don't have a private office somewhere. What you don't know is that I work for the Ministry, but not. I work for the Department of Mysteries son. I'm a mind healer and general healer for its operatives."

"Bloody hell," Sirius muttered into the quiet room, causing everyone to laugh nervously. Hermione herself had to smile even more at James's face as he stared at his father in shock. In fact, it took him several long minutes before he managed to close his mouth enough to look to give his mother another questioning look. "No dear, I'm not a part of that group, though I can't say the same for everyone else though," she said, looking around pointedly at everyone, including themselves.

The boys couldn't have appeared more surprised if you told him their favorite Quidditch team was in last place. Both sets of eyes turned immediately to the group from the future with James in complete shock and Sirius just looking like his mother was singing the praises of the Muggle Queen of England. Neither one of them had any idea about just what was going on, but it was clear they definitely wanted answers. These looks were making Hermione very nervous, but she

took comfort from her bondmates' calmness as both Luna and Harry were surprisingly unaffected. In fact, Harry spoke up next in response to their silent demands, "Yes, that includes us. We're actually in training, in a manner of speaking. And no, I can tell you sending new operatives to school is not standard operating procedure. It just happened this way due to extenuating circumstances."

"WHAT extenuating circumstances?" James shouted incredulously. Sirius looked like he was going to pass out from shock and disbelief. Hermione could only guess James felt they lied to him, and Sirius just didn't know what to think. It was not surprising given the situation that neither one of them were taking this well at all. "Ravenshire didn't have any survivors, did it?" he continued, indignation growing with each passing word. "Who exactly are you?" Hermione was watching serious nod vehemently with his friend/brother, and she knew it was only a matter of time before he blew up.

Hermione snaked an arm around Harry's middle, which was immediately overlapped by Luna's. Together they gave their lover a tight squeeze as Harry turned slightly sheepish. He cleared his voice a couple of times and said, "No, Ravenshire did not have any survivors. We took the public identities of people who have died there because it was easier to build off of an existing person than try to invent a person from complete scratch. As to why we did that . . . Well, it's . . . complicated."

Hermione heard Ron snort in the background and mutter, "Bloody right its complicated mate. And the Founding Four are slightly famous by comparison." Next thing Hermione heard was a head being smacked followed by Ron saying, "Bloody hell woman, get off!" Another smack was heard followed by Ginny's voice chiding for language.

"You're getting off light, whoever you really are," Sirius finally said. "I'm tempted to do more than smack you. You lied to us and pretended to be friends with us. And then you had the bloody gall to lecture us about sensitivity and all that rot. How do you think we'd take it? And now you're acting like it's all some big joke. It's. Not. Bloody. Funny."

“Please forgive my brother. I’m convinced he was dropped on his head at birth,” Ginny interjected to Ron’s loud protestation. “He’s only trying to lighten the atmosphere a bit. Unfortunately my brother is a bit thick when it comes to relationships. We didn’t lie to you about our feelings, either of you. We do like you and we would like to consider you friends, if not family. And yes James, we kept the relationships we had the same regardless of who we were calling ourselves. This git really is my brother, and the silent one really is my boyfriend,” she said, smiling widely at Neville, who smiled back.

“All that’s fine,” James responded, “But this still doesn’t answer just who in the bloody hell are you?!” Grace quickly admonished James for the language, but apparently James was too shocked to answer her back. Instead he was looking at Harry who was talking to both Hermione and Luna quickly. James had only seen them talk mentally a couple of times, but he had always said it disturbed him slightly. Finally all three nodded before Harry spoke.

“I am the last of the Potter line, from the future. I, as well as my friends, were sent back in time to train so we can learn to defeat the Dark Lord of our time. It may seem a bit drastic for training, but circumstances were such that there was no other option open to us.” Hermione suppressed the urge to giggle at James’s dumbstruck face, instead she simply gave a small smile before taking up the next part.

“I was believed to be a First Generation Witch from Halstead’s time, though that seems to have been a lie. I started school the same time he did, and he, Ryan, and I became very good friends in our time. We were called the “Golden Trio” actually. Not a year went by that our lives weren’t threatened or manipulated. Our fifth year we formed a defense group. Nathan and Lilith joined us during that time, as well as Ryan’s younger sister Gwyneth. The end of our fifth year saw the six of us breaking into the Department of Mysteries to rescue one of the only family members Halstead had left, only to find it was a trap. We managed to hold our own against 12 dark wizards and witches until help supposedly arrived. Afterward Halstead nearly lost his life to Muggle relatives, but he was revived and we were sent here.” James and Flitwick both looked upon the six with wide astonished eyes.

They seemed flabbergasted at what they heard, which only caused Hermione to think, 'Wait and listen, you haven't heard anything yet.'

Luna chuckled at Hermione's thought, which caused several indignant faces to turn toward her before she spoke up, "Sorry, inside joke. We can laugh at it because we've already been through it. But anyway, we got to this time and started our training, then went back to Hogwarts. There we learned quite a few things besides what is taught in class. It's those things that caused us to call you all together now. We have learned some things which we feel impelled to pass on so plans can be made. But I must stress that there are certain events that must happen and some people who cannot be touched at this time. To do otherwise would be courting disaster. We're going to have to ask you to take your cues from us for the next few years. Else we may have to obliviate you."

James apparently couldn't take any more as he gave the group a withering glare, "And what would you know about letting things happen? How do you know that changing something won't change it for the better." Hermione had to remark to herself that the others were being very quiet right now, though it was apparent that they had already surmised the very conclusions they were telling them. Still, it was very hard to hear James's bitter words directed at them, or Sirius's looks of near disbelieving disgust. She sent Harry a comforting thought as she watched him glare at his father in return.

"Okay, let's pick one close to home, shall we James?" Harry half-sneered, having had enough of the abuse from his father and godfather. Hermione increased the comfort she was sending him in hopes to calm him down, for the last thing they needed was Harry blowing up. She loved him dearly, but he was not the most pleasant of people to be around when he was angry. "Your last case of arrogant abuse of Severus Snape comes to mind. Or do you not remember what I told you about Evans? I knew you were going to do that, hell I could have scripted the entire scene where you played the arrogant bully, because I saw it before in a memory. And yes James, you heard me right, I said you were a bully. I could have stepped in and stopped it earlier. It likely would have given us a chance to prevent Snape from making the wrong decision and thus causing the death of nearly every last member of this family and several others. I

could have saved Evans the grief of losing one of her oldest friends. But do you know what would have happened if I did? This family would have still died save I wouldn't have been born more than likely, and Voldemort would have won quite easily since there would have been no one left with the knowledge of how to stop him. So James, how does it feel to know that your actions cemented the fate of so many?"

James's complexion paled dramatically as his parents looked at him with disapproving glares. He had apparently not told them of that incident, and now had the grace to look embarrassed at his outburst. Sirius just looked thoughtful, as he wanted to bring up another point even if he knew it wasn't germane to the topic at hand. "Is it too late?" the young man asked hopefully.

"Yes, it is," Harry replied a little less vehemently, though still upset. Harry was apparently looking to get a point across though as he continued, "And just for reference, I really despise bullies. Most people do. If you ever expect to get anywhere with Evans, you need to change your ways. And try to find a way to get her to forgive you for costing her one of her oldest friends." He closed his eyes and shook his head. "You have no idea how much I wanted to stop that entire scene, but if I did the results would have been disastrous. Likewise there are other things that must happen and something that must be changed without anyone knowing."

"The most primary law of time travel is that you must not be seen," Jason interjected, nodding in understanding. "So what caused you to call this meeting then? I would think you would want to keep anything you find out to yourselves."

Hermione watched James as he drew into himself quietly to listen to the conversation. Her heart reached for her father-in-law. Today's revelations could not have gone down all that well. Sirius looked even more upset when faced with the consequences of his actions. Still, it was time to get to the meat of the matter and Harry was plunging forward. "Jason, were you aware that the Penwells were the last known magical line of Rowena Ravenclaw?" Jason's obvious look of

shock seemed to confirm that he didn't. "It's too late to change it Jason, I'm already too well known to change it now."

"But Halstead . . . " Jason started. Charles looked glum right now, and it didn't take someone of Hermione's intelligence to see the look of betrayal forming on his face. "The founder lines went in hiding to avoid being killed off." Hermione watched as Charles's head snapped over toward Jason in surprise as if trying to figure out how he knew that.

"No Charles, I didn't tell him about that," Harry responded, leaving both James and Sirius lost yet again. "He has access to the Penwell family tome, which he obviously hasn't finished reading yet. But where he found that was most likely in the Slytherin minor line tome, which I know for a fact he has read. By the way Jason, the Penwell tome needs to go to needs to go to Pheobe," he added. After Jason nods, Harry cleared his throat. "Charles, Jason has promised protection to any Founders Heir that asked for it. We were tasked with just two over-all missions from him. First we were to find out who was behind the silent war on the Founders Heirs and second we were to investigate Hogwarts and remove the subversive influences within." At this Harry stood up and started to walk over to the fireplace. He stopped in front of the mantle and looked up at the Potter before the coat of arms. "The first mission I regret to inform you we have succeeded, but the second is going to require a very long term concerted effort over several generations to fully clear."

"Explain," Jason said succinctly as Charles leaned against the back of his chair in apparent thought.

"Wait, before you explain that, what do you mean about hunting the Founders' Lines? Who would be stupid enough to do something like that?" Sirius seemed to be on another track however, one Hermione could rather easily identify by his looking at each of them in turn. His face, which had regained color from the earlier revelations, started to pale again. Fortunately for them, he looked directly at Hermione, who sent a pleading look of 'later' his way. He nodded once, satisfied to wait until this part of the conversation was over.

“It hasn't been known as to who, James,” Charles spoke up much to Jame's shock. Sirius, Hermione noticed, fixated on Harry at this point. Hermione knew there would be more talks with Sirius in the future. She was not used to him thinking things through like this. “At least, to those families that needed to know. The very reason you haven't ever met anyone who claimed to be a Founder's Heir before is because of they keep themselves well hidden from sight.” He nodded once at James' next silent question before motioning Harry to continue.

“The war against the Founders Heirs has been waged by the one family that has been considered the least likely to do so. Unfortunately, or fortunately depending how you look at it, we have found proof that states not only is it likely one particular family, but it is fact.” With this he started to explain how the most commonly accepted stories about the Founders was wrong. Yes, Salazar Slytherin did have a fight with the other three, but it was discovered that he was controlled by the Dark Lord of the time instead of being the Dark Lord of the time. He broke free of the Dark Lord's hold, but his children split along the Dark/Light line. This caused a split in the family. These events sealed the doom of all the Founders as they could not work together due to the fracture of one of the families involved. One by one they fell to the Dark Lord until Godric's death at 130 years of age. He showed them copies of several passages referring to a family they called “Bumblebee.” He then explained the family changed their name and started to act like Lords of Light, thus avoiding suspicion as they began to hunt the lines that went underground. The name the chose was Dumbledore, which meant Bumblebee. This helped drop the last stigma of their old names and allowed them to start fresh. With the fresh new reputation they slowly began taking over the Wizarding World until finally with the current generation they just about succeeded. Finally he looked Charles in the eyes and said, “The current Lord Dumbledore is of course Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts and Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot. And as you now know, he's rather highly placed in our government.”

Hermione could have heard a pin drop by the silence in the room. Jason, who people had deemed as unable to be surprised had a deeply shocked and bothered look on his face. James looked ill,

Sirius for the first time anyone from the future had ever seen looked scared, and Charles looked wearily upset. "What can we do, he's far too powerful to just accuse, remove, and dispose. He's a world-wide hero whose most likely to wind up Supreme Mugwump of the ICW. Yet at the same time he's a clear and present danger to the world, not to mention the Founder families."

"Is he aware of your familial status Halstead?" Jason interjected. Grace grabbed her husband's arm in desperate shock as she looked at Harry to answer the question. James gave a violent sudden shiver at the revelation that statement inferred.

"Yes and no," Hermione spoke up. "He thinks Harry is the last Heir of the Ravenclaw line, which is bad enough in this situation." Harry nodded in agreement as she continued, "If he knew the truth, no one in this room would be safe."

"I think, Ms. Galway, you should explain to me what you meant earlier this year when you told me your team was in serious danger if he ever knew the truth about you," Professor Flitwick interjected.

"It's simple really. All six of us are part of the Founder's lines, with four of us being Heirs. Of the other two, one is a sister of an Heir, and the other is a distant cousin twice removed." Charles of course makes the immediate connection and snaps his head toward Luna, who rewards him with a beaming smile and a nod. Sirius looked like he was both happy and profoundly upset that he was right in his guess and offered them all a look of commiseration. "That and we're from a future where what Mr. Potter has indicated has actually happened, Dumbledore is the Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards. And we have had several run-ins with him before, though we never remembered them until just after we nabbed McGonagall." At James's confusion, they went on to explain what had actually happened to the deputy headmistress just after her ascendancy.

After a few more questions they moved on to the second mission, their investigation of Hogwarts. Here Harry once again took the reigns to begin. "Hogwarts is both the same and different in our time. There,

the house rivalry is not quite as bad as it is now, but it still is bad. Much like saying skim milk is not quite the same as two percent milk, really. The main difference comes in that the tension of Hogwarts seems to be more outside fueled by parents than inside by the students. And of course there's more students that could fit in more than one house in our time than there are now. The students now seem to lean more toward their house characteristics than others. That and the professors aren't quite as militant and uniform in our time as they are now."

"Well, if they're newer to Hogwarts than the current staff, that would explain it. Otherwise I wonder if it could mean he's brainwashed more people like he had McGonagall." Minerva McGonagall had been returned to Hogwarts a fortnight after her capture. Harry had asked why it took so long (people were beginning to ask the wrong questions), which was when they learned that she had been under several magical oaths to be loyal to Dumbledore and Dumbledore alone. She was also under a potion regimen to be more conducive to suggestions by the headmaster. Finally she had a mark of a bumblebee on the small of her back that looked too much like a Dark Mark. They had analyzed that and discovered that it acted pretty much just like a Dark Mark on a Death Eater. The unspeakables flushed her system and gave her permanent antidotes, and sent her back.

Neville had appeared deep in thought for a few minutes before saying, "I can see some of them, especially our potions professor in the future, but others no. I think it more has to do with the runic spell above the door frames at the Entrance."

"What runic spell?" Jason asked. Hermione then gave him a set of parchment with a long and thorough evaluation of the runes above the main doors, and how it spurred the students into not getting along and made the teachers antagonistic to each other. "It would be a brilliant piece of work, if it wasn't so nasty," Jason replied once the explanation was done.

Hermione herself could only nod as Harry finally said, "I think that would be step one in trying to remove Dumbledore's influence. I have

a plan for the rest, but it will take at least a generation or two to work out.” With this they made plans to start slowly removing the Headmaster’s influence, sticking to ways that would not change history too much. It was also decided that Team Gamma would remove the runic spell.

After a couple more hours of talking Jason and Flitwick left, leaving a confused Sirius and a flabbergasted James there. “Okay, I just have one more question, why was I involved in this discussion? Most of it seemed like none of my business,” Sirius asked. The man looked between Charles and Harry, hoping one of them would tell him.

“You were here because you needed to know what was going on. You see, the Potters are the last family from the Gryffindor line.” James sat back in resignation as the truth finally was put in plain speech. He sat and listened as his father began to explain the family history to him a year early. Sirius listened carefully as well, seeming to understand that he was being let in on secret he would never known about had things been different. Every once in a while he'd look at the group of them with a curious expression, almost as if trying to figure out a puzzle piece.

Hermione on the other hand settled back to listen in as she reflected on what exactly all this meant for the triad. They would be joining the Ravenclaw and Gryffindor lines together, and adding another Gryffindor line in. The ramifications for their children would be something else entirely, and would require careful consideration. She smiled a little as she thought about the children the three would have, and the love the entire family would have. If anyone deserved that, it would be Harry.

“So why is Dumbledore so adamant about ridding the world of the Founder Lines?” James asked in confusion. “He doesn’t strike me as the pureblood supremacist type.”

“That’s because he isn’t, really. He has other plans, which I’m only now beginning to piece together. But what he’s after is power. The Founder’s Lines, even with the blood debate, are a threat to that power. The Founders lost, and lost Hogwarts to the man. The only

resistance left where Hogwarts is concerned is the castle itself, and its failing. It itself calculates that in another one or two generations from this time, its final resistances will fall. And since the Founder Heir titles must be ritualistically claimed, if even one of the lines fails to pass on its knowledge, that will end it."

Charles's head snaps toward Harry at this statement and asks, "In your time, how many failed? How many is Hogwarts short in your time?"

Neville speaks up to answer the question before Harry can, "Two. Gryffindor and Ravenclaw. We'll have to pull together some resources to handle both cases, though Ginny and I are working on an idea to circumvent the problem."

Ginny then smiles and adds, "Gryffindor is going to be the easier of the two to circumvent really. If you think about it Mr. Potter, you'll realize what can be done. To give you a hint, you've all but done it last summer."

Charles appears thoughtful for a moment, then smiles widely. "Halstead, I'll wish to speak to you alone in the very near future. I will teach you what you need to know to be the Gryffindor Heir." James gave his father an incredulous look for a moment, then seemed to grasp something and simply waited for his father to continue. "Son, you'll still be the Potter Heir. The line will have to divide for now, especially since Halstead was already accepted by Godric's picture. It's nothing against you, more it is a family and line survival tactic we're going to have to employ. I suspect you already have a good inkling as to Halstead's final secret. Regardless of whether or not you do, you'll know soon enough. I'm going to have to teach you and Sirius occlumency so Dumbledore can't rip the secrets from your mind."

This last explanation seems to fortify James and Sirius, and they finally nodded a few minutes later. "It's a clever ruse, Dad. And since Halstead is already likely to be able to keep people out of his mind, its logical not to include him. I can accept it, all things considered. But what about Ravenclaw? If the Penwells were the last magical line, and they're already dead, what can be done about Ravenclaw?"

Ginny and Neville appear to share the same mischievous look before answering to the room, "You'll see sooner or later, once we overcome a problem or three." As that was all the group thought they could get out of the duo, the topic soon turned toward the next school year and what would happen then.

Main Gates

Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

Sunday, August 1, 1976

Charlemagne's POV

It took four days from that meeting to plan their attack on Hogwarts. During that time they spent training alongside another team, this one a three man, so as to work fluidly with them. The other team had Hermione's notes, and had spoken long and hard with her on what exactly the ward's abilities were. It would be up to this other team to break the runic spell, with Hermione helping to cushion the castle's wards and hopefully prevent anyone from knowing what they were doing until it was too late. The rest of Team Gamma would be guards for the curse breaking team. That way the curse breakers could focus only on the spell and not worry about any other attacks. Harry himself wondered if they were tempting fate by planning something like this, but he soon realized that the old fool would try something eventually anyway. So all they were doing really was striking first, and putting him off guard by making him think there was another player on the field.

In a way, Harry was hoping Dumbledore would come down and try to stop them. He was eager to dish out some punishment, and only regretted that Dumbledore could not know who was spanking him and why. Oh, Harry knew he couldn't permanently harm or kill the bastard, but putting the old man in the hospital for a few days seemed to be the best medicine he could ask for. A much more thorough punishment could be given later, after all. He was just itching to get a chance to mete out some revenge for the lives Dumbledore had ruined in his bid for power. Oh, he was warned against seeking personal retribution, but in truth it was about more than just him. Oh

no, Dumbledore had to answer for Hermione's and Luna's lives as well. No one hurt his family, no one.

Harry shook his head violently to clear himself of those feelings so he could focus on the job at hand. Silently they made their way toward the Hogwarts Main doors, casting Notice-me-not charms as they went. None of them wanted to deal with the daunting task of quieting Hagrid down, after all. Finally they reached the doors and Team Sigma stepped forward along with Hermione. They formed a diamond with one point pointing directly at the wards, the other three arrayed behind them and the odd person on the side pointed toward the forest. Hestia, the leader of Team Sigma, drew her wand and started. The other three quickly drew their wands and followed suit, causing the very air pressure around them to increase with their magic. They looked remarkably calm, but Harry knew it was a strain, if for no other reason than the feelings he was getting from Hermione.

Harry shook his head loose of the cobwebs and directed his team to surround the curse-breaking team, all facing outwards. Harry himself took a position next to the doors, his wand held aloft as he looked around the corner at the doors to ensure he was ready for whatever happened. Slowly the runic structure became visible to the naked eye as it glowed a deep red. Up until now, everything seemed to fall within plans, but the castle shuddered an instant later as a loud scream echoed inside and outside the school. "Shit, there was a trap on the ward. Someone has updated this recently!" Hermione exclaimed as her focus shifted to try to counter the trap.

But it was too late. Harry felt a concerted assault on the charms they had set up as they moved in, and knew it was only a matter of time before the charms broke down. "Liber, Sun Tsu, you've got company on your side, remember the pairs training," Harry called. Instantly Neville squatted down and started casting advance shields meant to cover a large area while Ron prepared himself for the offensive work. They had managed to come up with barricade shields that allowed people to fire out of them, but not into them unless you were incredibly lucky and an incredibly good shot. Harry extended his own senses as his battlefield awareness kicked in. They had discovered during the last school year that Harry had a special sense that combined limited precognition and clairvoyance, allowing him to

sense everything happening in an area round him. Not only that, but he could semi-reliably predict enemy movements when under this condition. "Athena, Selene, be ready. Hagrid and Vector are headed your way. Remember folks, fight to containment only. We do not want deaths here."

"What about you Charlemagne?" Sun Tsu called out as he drew out a second wand. They had only started two wand dueling this summer, but Ron took to it like no one else save Harry himself.

"Dumbledore is coming from inside. I've got him," Harry said grimly as he took his second wand out. Even as he prepared himself for a fight he knew would be very difficult, he couldn't help but to feel a bit of excitement. Now was the time to pay Dumbledore back for the pain the old man caused. The wolfish part of him growled in anticipation as he slipped to the doors and opened them.

The runic spell couldn't activate against Harry as its magic was bound up in the assault against it. Thus Harry was feeling nothing as he stepped through the threshold just as the last of the confudus wards came down. Harry smiled as his vision cleared to show the old man in front of him. The Headmaster started when confronted with the dark gray of the unspeakables in front of him. Harry watched the old man's eyes trace from one wand to the other, then to the gray robes he was wearing. Harry's appearance there had seemed to throw the man for a loop, a thought which was proven a moment later when the old man said, "Who are you and why is the Department of Mysteries attacking my school?"

As eager as he was to fight Dumbledore, Harry still was not such a fool to let his emotions run away with him. He was here to do a job, and right now Dumbledore could win most contests. So instead of attacking him all out he let one hand drop back to put up a barrier between him and the curse breaking team. Sounds of fighting started outside, accompanied by loud "gong" noises as spells hit shields. "We are not attacking the school, Headmaster Dumbledore. Someone had put a ward up on the keystone above your main doorway that could seriously harm both staff and students alike. As it was brought to our attention we decided it would be best if we studied it and removed it.

We wouldn't want students to get hurt by unfriendly spells, would we?"

"Of course not," Dumbledore replies in that grandfatherly tone that seems to just get under Harry's skin. "But the ward you're destroying is beneficial to the student body. It isn't a danger to the students at all."

"I'm afraid our curse breakers disagree with you, Headmaster. As they're amongst the foremost experts in this kind of magic, I'm afraid their word will have to take precedence here. So I'm sorry to say it will come down. We cannot afford, given the times, to let it stay up." Harry shifted his stance slightly bringing his right hand forward. He knew the talking was just about at an end, and the next exchange would be spell casting.

Sure enough, Dumbledore's demeanor dropped and the old manipulative man showed through. "It's too bad, really. A group of unspeakables going rogue. I'm afraid I had to stop you, so sorry about the needless casualties." With this a nearly clear spell shot from the old man's wand to the floor just before him, causing a giant tiger to spring forth.

As the tiger came forward, Harry realized he could waste no more time. With one wand he anchored the shield he cast to protect the curse breakers onto the doors themselves while casting an over-powered slicing spell through the tiger. Unfortunately he had to take his eyes off his opponent, so he missed the blasting spell shot at his chest. In fact if he had not been wearing both his cloak and dragonhide armor, he would have died right there. As it is he was thrown into a wall which cracked into a spiderweb impact point before his body slid down. Another yellow beam was heading straight for him, but he just barely managed to dodge it in his dazed state.

Harry had to give the old man credit, he was good. Spell after spell, all of them potentially lethal, rained upon him as he continued to dodge them. Some he couldn't dodge completely though as a bone-breaker that was aimed for his chest hit his left elbow. Harry dived toward some debris which he levitated into position to use as a shield.

In an act of pure desperation, he directed his magic to the broken bones and willed them to be set. The sharp pain of the wandless spell caused him to hiss as the bone was set. Figuring he had another three seconds, he tried to think of something that would help him in this situation. Finally getting an idea, he acted.

Just as the boulder was destroyed Harry sprinted out from behind it, both of his wands flicking very fast in multiple feats of wordless and, unbeknown to him, wandless magic. Debris from the fight instantly flew up to about his stomach height where they began to swirl around him. As each new piece of stone joined the ring, it flashed bright blue. Finally Harry made it around the room to the far side in time for Dumbledore to spring a trap. Unfortunately for him, Harry's spell and magic had other plans.

A barrage of diffindos, reductos, and bombardas started raining down on him again. This time the stones took each and every spell, but only the bombardas had any kind of effect on the stones. The rest of the spells only hit shields on the stones, causing them to be spread all about the main hall. More and more debris fell, which immediately began adding to the mass of shielded rock around him. The bombardas that managed to get through the shields still hit rock, breaking them into smaller pieces that twirled up above the main ring. These Harry banished back at Dumbledore at a high rate of speed. Soon Dumbledore had to go on the defensive as a meteor storm of castle rock seemed to follow his every movement. Harry felt for sure he had the man cornered now.

He quickly found out he was wrong however as a blast of pure magic banished all the debris away from Dumbledore, leaving only the ring around Harry. Smirking, the old man then cast a reddish-blue spell at Harry which of course was intercepted by the stones. But instead of striking the shields, the spell went through them and hit the stones. In very short order Harry found himself surrounded by a pool of hot lava. The spell he was using worked fine on solids, but not liquids, so a whirlpool of lava was slowly forming around him. With a loud pop Harry ended the spell and apparated away from the lava.

This got Dumbledore's attention in a way nothing else could. "Ah . . . A Founder's Heir," the old man smiled. "What a pleasant surprise," he

said as he performed another series of intricate wand movements. Before Harry could react, he was encased in a sphere of water. "I'm sorry my boy, but you're going to meet with an unfortunate accident. Its tragic really. At least I can see who you are before you die. Ostendo occultus."

Harry felt the edges of panic invading his senses as he started to drown. At the same time he felt the spell speed through the water and hit his hood. Fortunately the new obscuring charm held against the spell amazingly well, causing the headmaster to frown. This had the added benefit of knocking him out of his panicky stages, thus allowing him to cast two spells at once. The sphere of water turned to ice, and the sphere crashed to the ground causing several cracks in both the floor and the sphere.

"Pity, I tried to tell you to be still, but you had to do that. Unfortunately there's no way to save you in time," the headmaster said in a fake saddened voice. Stepping around the sphere, the old man made his way to the doors to head outside. But the wards still held, and he was incapable of leaving the Main Hall. "Ah well, I can just wait for a moment while the ward fails."

Suddenly a loud song was heard through the hall, bringing with it the joys of a crisp winter's day. An explosion of ice occurred behind and to the right of the shocked supposed victor as Harry re-appeared holding on to his Pheonix's tail. "Don't count me out quite yet old man. You're not the only one to have phoenix protection." Before the old man could bring his wand to bear, the ice sphere shattered and reformed into a giant dragon of ice, which immediately went bearing down upon the old man, mouth open. "And never give your enemy a weapon."

Dumbledore threw himself to the side to avoid the dragon's bite, casting a fire spell as he did. The spell seemed to fizzle and die on the side of the wyvern-like ice dragon's side, gouging only a small dent out of said hide. The dragon's body came right back up and attacked again while Harry used the time to catch his breath. It had become painfully clear to him he was out-matched by the older man. He'd still need more training to beat him. Still, every minute he kept

the old man occupied was another minute the curse breakers could use to complete their work. Suddenly the ice dragon exploded into a million pieces when Dumbledore hit it with a fiendfyre spell directly in the mouth. The fire rushed toward him next, letting Harry know it was truly time to get out of here. 'Hermione, are you done yet? Things are deteriorating rather quickly here.' Harry had to dodge to the side while casting several high level ice charms to avoid getting caught by the fiendfyre.

'Just about . . . THERE! We just finished. Pull out Harry!' answered Hermione. Breathing a sigh of relief, Harry prepared to do just that.

"Well, it looks like our time is up, old man. So sorry we couldn't stay and chat, but I should be getting to my next assignment now. Divinus glacies!" Suddenly the entire great hall iced over, as did the forms within the fiendfyre. Harry then cast a traction spell on his feet and started heading for the door..

"Tenax calx," he heard from behind him as he reached within 3 feet of the door. Harry felt something grab his ankle, causing him to fall to the floor. He winced slightly as he felt his ankle twist, but failed to show it on the outside. "I'm sorry my dear boy, but I can't let you leave. Its for your own good you know. It's dangerous to be a Founder's Heir out there. You never know when someone's going to kill you." Dumbledore took several steps closer as he spoke, obviously ignoring the multitude of injuries he had gained in the battle.

Harry somehow knew the transfiguration spell would not buckle under a standard finite, so he had to find another way out. Suddenly an inspiration hit as he smiled. "I don't think I'll be accepting your invitation," he said just before calling his animagus form into play. The grasping hand did not react quickly enough to the impossibly quick transformation Harry was capable of, and he quite easily stepped out of it. Tucking his wings back against his body he launched himself at the old man, attempting to take a bite out of him, only to be met by horns from a ram.

Unfortunately for Dumbledore winged dire wolves do not injure quite as easily. Even hampered by a wounded back leg Harry quickly

gained an upper hand as he bit the goat in a number of places. Dumbledore quickly changed back and started firing over-powered diffindos at the wolf in hopes of slowing him down. Three such cuts managed to make it through to the main body, which only served to enrage the wolf further. With amazing quickness and agility the dire wolf bit down hard upon the headmaster's wand hand while scratching a deep gouge into the other hand with a front claw.

Seeing the man temporarily defenseless Harry stepped back and transformed into himself again. "You're lucky we need you alive old man, or I'd finish the job," he snarled with much more confidence in his voice than he actually possessed. "In the meantime, there are some things I just can't let you remember. Obliviate!" Harry decided to wait a few seconds before starting, just to be sure the spell took. "You will remember nothing about me apparating on school grounds, nor will you remember my animagus form. The unspeakables came here under orders from the DMLE to investigate a danger to the students, you will not remember anything about their individual identities."

Harry smiled about a minute later as he saw the tell-tale signs of the obliviate working. He then stood himself up and said, "I'm sorry you disagreed with this action, sir, but it was for the greater good." With that he turned and left the slightly bewildered man to wait for medical attention while he walked back out onto the grounds. Hagrid was the only attacker that was still standing as the rest had apparently been overcome by the unspeakables' spellfire. Seeing they needed to stop Hagrid to make their escape, Harry decided to end the battle. With a flick of his wand the half-giant was hanging in the air by an ankle. "Go on, I've got him." After a moment's hesitation Hestia acknowledged the order and shooed everyone out to leave Harry alone with Hagrid. "Stop struggling," he calmly commanded. "There are more important things to worry about than subduing us."

"What would ye know?" Hagrid bellowed. "You attacked us."

"No groundskeeper, you attacked us. We were assigned to look into a spell that posed a real threat to the students of the school. We were in that process when you came here firing curses at us. We merely

defended ourselves,” Harry returned with a gesture towards the bodies littering the ground. “So instead of fighting me, and losing, don’t you think you should help your fallen comrades? Your headmaster is pretty beat up inside as well.”

This caused the half-giant to become enraged. “Let me go!” he bellowed, struggling harder. Harry could feel the drain on his magic as it fought to keep him aloft. It started to drain even faster than the battle with Dumbledore had, and that had drained him pretty good.

Finally Harry decided retreat was the best option, especially before Hagrid’s yelling either brought more attention or friends. “You’ll be dropped when I’ leave these grounds. I wold not recommend chasing us as we will be gone before then and you have people to help.” With that Harry turned and left toward the main gates, willing Hagrid to stay where he was. Once he stepped outside the gates his spell ended, causing Hagrid to fall to the ground, and freeing Harry to apparate out before said groundskeeper could stand.

Department of Mysteries

Minsistry for Magic

London, England

Hermione’s POV

Hermione felt almost completely spent. Even though she had spent nearly the entire mission helping with the ward removal it still took a lot of energy. The runic spell fought back like a living thing, and Hermione wound up having to guard the curse breakers in order to give them time to destroy it. At the same time she had to keep the shields up around the team to avoid them getting hit by any stray spells from the battles raging on around them. It even got to the point she was barely able to keep hold of the portkeys that brought them all back here.

Even though she was the most magically drained of all those who remained outside the castle, she was not the most injured. That credit belonged to Neville, whose right leg and left arm were both hit by piercing spells from Mr. Sanders, Madam Hooch’s predecessor. Add to that the bludgeoning curse he was hit with by Madam Kettleburn that broke his other leg and a couple of ribs, and he was not doing

very well. Ginny and Luna got off light primarily due to their size and agility. But the person she was most worried about was Harry. He still was not back yet, and he didn't look too good when he left the castle. Her only solace was she could still feel him in the bond. But at the same time she could feel his pain and it was distracting her. She was so distracted in fact she missed Jason's question about the curse breaking. A soft mental nudge by Luna along with Jason clearing his throat got her attention. She quickly answered his question and was about to raise her concern to the head Unspeakable when the door to the infirmary popped open to reveal Harry.

Hermione started to get up to rush to him when Jason grabbed her arm. "He's hurt, you'll only make it worse," the older man whispered to her. Nodding acknowledgment she sent a mental hug while he was shown to a bed. "What the bloody hell happened to you Charlemagne?" Jason asked as he watched the healers work over the young man.

"I messed up," Harry answered directly. She could feel the disappointment through the bond, and judging from the feelings she was getting from Luna, she could too. Together they started to send warm feelings of comfort and acceptance toward their mate while Jason got a detailed report of what happened. Finally Harry said, "I underestimated him, and I very nearly didn't leave alive as a result. He had me good with that transfiguration, and if it weren't for my animagus form, I'd be gone. I also had to obliviate him to keep certain inconvenient truths away from him." Hermione could see he was pretty bad off with burns, cuts and bone-deep bruises riddled his body. His ankle was broken as well. She winced when she heard that, but reminded herself that he'd be okay.

Jason nodded at this and said, "Well, we'll go over everything in the debriefing the day after tomorrow. The healers say that's how long you and Liber will be in here. In the end all we can do is hope the obliviate took, otherwise he'll figure things out. So all of you need to get rest. Those of you who can physically train will be expected to report to the training room tomorrow. Those that can't will still have their theory and book learning to do." He then turned toward Hermione and approached her, "You mentioned earlier you had a specific request. What was it?"

Hermione nodded and said, "Sir, I'd like to start working on the introductory spell crafting literature sometime soon. I think that's where I'll be the biggest help in the future."

Jason nodded and gave her a smile. "That's what I thought you'd do. I would also recommend becoming a full arithmancer as well. If anyone could do it, you could." Hermione was thrilled with the suggestion and nodded. She smiled even more when he promised to get the books for her within the next couple of days. After Jason left, she moved herself to a bed next to Harry's and took his hand. He was already asleep but she didn't care. She just needed to be with him for a while.

Headmaster's office
Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry
Later that evening
Dumbledore's POV

It took most of the day for Albus to fix the damage to the main hall. To be honest, he hadn't been challenged like that since the last time he and Tom had fought. Poor man, little did he would be Dark Lord realize that Dumbledore set up many of his targets. The headmaster didn't even need anyone on the inside loyal to set him up. No, all Albus needed to do was plant a suggestion here, a rumor there, and soon enough it would reach Tom's ears, and Tom would react. That was the older man's biggest and best weapon after all. He knew what made people tick, and it was very easy to manipulate strings to get them exactly where he wanted them. To a person like him, the Dark Lord was nothing but a puppet dancing to Albus's tune.

That ability served him well in other places as well. By knowing the people around him and being able to tug on the appropriate strings, he was able to climb his way to the top of the Wizengamot. He kept his position there by keeping everyone occupied with everyone else while he sat back and played the "wise old grandfather" game. It had worked so well that the people around him wanted him to be Minister for Magic every time the seat came open. But he'd never take it, at least not in the near future. The Minister's job was too open, and his

support structure was all wrong for keeping him in that office. No, he'd rather be the man behind the throne.

Even so, he knew he'd have to increase his influence even further if he wanted to finally realize his family's dream: to be the undisputed leader of the entire world, both magical and muggle. His family didn't care about pureblood politics, not really. In fact, his family only used pureblood supremacy as something to distract everyone else while they took more and more control over the world around them. Eventually they would make a law requiring purebloods and half-bloods to marry muggle-borns, and that would be the end of resistance from the purebloods. Until then, it was better to keep the two groups at each other's throats.

That was what upset Dumbledore the most about today's events. One of the biggest and best tools he had to keep that fire going was that ward. It kept everyone at odds and made it so people wouldn't listen to the eventual middle-line arguments the neutrals were espousing. But someone in the Department of Mysteries found out about it and apparently decided to take it down. How they even found out about it was beyond him. There was an obscuring charm on the ward stone so strong that it should have kept anything short of a phoenix from discovering it. But someone did, and told the department. The end result was the incident today.

What was worse was the fact that he was obliterated. Whoever it was he fought was very skilled and knowledgeable. He knew every move, every strategy Albus had, and wasn't afraid of him. That could not do. One of his biggest defenses was that everyone considered him very powerful, and thus were too afraid to attack him. Even his puppet knew better than to fight him with magic, which was one of the limiters he had on the Dark Lord to prevent a hostile take over. But the man he fought had no fear of him and quite a bit of power as well. And then the man tried to erase Albus's memory. Albus's fingers gripped the papers on his desk in a silent show of anger. How dare he!

And what was even more disconcerting was that the spell worked, for the most part. One of the most advanced forms of occlumency prevented all but the most powerful obliviate spells from taking hold.

But somehow even after a long duel the unspeakable had enough power to actually cast the spell. In the end the only piece of the information left from the erasure attempt was the suspicion that if he could get hold of young Mr. Penwell, then all would be set right. But to do that he needed to get the young man and his friends away from the Potter protection. Then he needed to get the young man away from his friends, and then and only then could he trap the boy and find the answers to so many of the questions he had. Regrettably the boy had to perish after that, but it was all for the best.

But how to do it? Yes, Charles and Grace Potter were old, but disgustingly healthy. So while the eldest Potters could not sire any more children, they still had vast influence. And the Potters were nothing if not loyal to each other, and all those they considered their own. But wait, Mr. Penwell and young Mr. Potter had a rather bad falling out just before summer break. Given the nature of the fight, it was highly unlikely they would trust each other any time soon. So if the Potter Heads could die sometime during this coming school year, Albus could step in and guide the troubled teen. Of course, he would arrange for the gap between Mr. Penwell and Mr. Potter to increase. So while he would not be able to control Mr. Potter due to the laws concerning Line Heirs he could cause enough of a rift to sow doubts in the mind of young Mr. Potter about the brat's good intentions. The one more nudge in the right direction would cause Mr. Potter to accuse Mr. Penwell of being involved somehow in a bid to wrest control of the Potter estate for himself, and that would be all that Dumbledore would need.

It would not do to have that boy suspected of having a part in Charles's death though. There was no real motive, and the case would not hold together at all. Instead, he'd have to make the deaths look natural from natural causes. From there he could spin an illusion that Mr. Penwell was opportunistic enough to take the funds the moment the opportunity expressed itself. Then he, as Chief Warlock, could step in and take charge of Mr. Penwell in the interests of determining the truth. From there everything else would fall into place, and the final Heir to the Ravenclaw line would be under his control. It was only by sheer luck the boy survived Ravenshire after all. Now he could correct that mistake. Ah well, better for Riddle to have

incompetent followers and be no threat to him than to have competent ones that would pose a bigger threat.

Finally deciding a course of action, he got up and walked over to where he kept his pensieve. After disengaging a few locking mechanisms he opened a door just behind the pedestal and squeezed through into another chamber. This chamber was actually a vault full of the lesser known possessions of historical figures. Books, journals, and other odds and ends of some of history's most famous people were stored in here, including the object he was looking for. He had in his possession the first private journal of Rowena Ravenclaw. He had found it in the wreckage of the Penwell estate and managed to hide it away until he needed it. Now was the time.

First he took it to his desk and started casting several spells on it. Then he took out a vial of murky brown liquid and poured it over the book (after donning basilisk hide gloves, that is). Then he cast a few more spells before packing the entire thing in a box. Anyone scanning it would find it was as magical as any Founder's Artifact should be, but other than that it would not be anything out of the ordinary. At the same time the first person to touch it would die within six months of a seemingly natural disease. This would also be spread to anyone who had intimate, private contact with the diseased person. To the world, it would be as if they died of natural causes and old age. And the book's spells could never be linked to him or the death. Thus there would be no chance to have it be anything else other than death by natural causes. Now all he had to do is send the package, which he would do anonymously the next day, and sit back and wait.

Chapter 11: Time, Loss, and Refinement

Gryffindor 6th Year Boys Dorm

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Scotland

December 15, 1976

James Potter's POV

James looked down at the envelope in his hands, not quite sure what to think. The man he admired most in this world was dying, and nothing could be done about it. The medi-wizard in charge of the case said it was simply old age, but both him and his mother at the same time? It seemed unlikely to him, but he wasn't a medi-wizard. The note said they'd die with-in hours of each other, and it wouldn't be much longer for either one of them. The note from the doctors was their "last hours notice." According to them, his parents were asking for him and the future people only. No others were to be allowed, not even Sirius. This didn't please James at all, all things considered.

James and Sirius were both rather leery of those six, especially after the revelations from this summer. James had a hard time with their actions to this point, given that they knew the future. Why couldn't they have changed things for the better? Why couldn't they have stopped the deaths? Why couldn't they take on Dumbledore now? Any changes they could make would be for the better, wouldn't it?

Sirius was of similar mind, but he reacted by not listening to them on those rare occasions when they would say something. In fact, the last time Halstead, if that was his real name, told Sirius something, his friend spoke up by saying, "Are you going to finally stand up and do something about it? No? Then bugger off and make your little plots." At the time James felt rather happy to see the look of hurt on Halstead's face, but later on and even now a rather substantial part of him felt bad about it. And even that was nothing compared to Lilith's and Haleigh's rather loud lecture a few days later. Worst yet, Lily had happened to come by near the end of their lecture and picked up where they left off. And even though she didn't know quite what the circumstances were, Lily was more than adamant about reminding them that the six transfer students depended upon James, and to a lesser extent, the others for help and some semblance of order.

Remus and Peter were quick to dis-associate themselves from Lily's wrath with very real excuses given they were not part of whatever argument was happening. Peter was at a loss when it came to the six, for he never seemed to be as popular with them as the other three Marauders were. In fact, the six teens never seemed to want to stay in his presence for very long unless one of the other Marauders were present. Oh, they were civil enough toward the rat animagus, but that was about all they were. And any questions as to why they were the way they were toward Peter was met with shrugs and aversions so subtle that no one even realized the subject changed until well after the conversation.

As much as Peter was at a loss where they were concerned, Remus seemed to have their number. And yet the werewolf would not fill the others in, citing the six's need for privacy. Of course this was nothing new. Moony always had a way of seeing through the most artfully spun illusions in the school to find the most hidden secrets there. And yet their friend never broke a confidence. That was not to say he didn't use it to his and his friend's advantage, but at the same time he would draw the line at divulging a secret he felt was important. James really couldn't blame Remus for that, given what little he himself knew about the six. But still, for some reason they had Remus' respect more than any of the others.

James let out a short sigh as he glanced down at the note. Still, orders were orders, and even if James didn't feel the six, especially Halstead were grateful enough for what the old man had done for them, he still could not disobey. So with a final shrug he said, "I'm going to go get them, mates. Meet me at the entry hall." Remus and Peter both nodded, though Sirius frowned heavily.

"Why do you need to go get those gits for?" Sirius demanded. "It's not like they actually care if the old man lived or died."

James answered the question with another shrug as he stepped out of the doorway and into the hallway, "Because dad said so. I can hardly disobey that, now can I?" If Sirius said anything after that James did not hear. Instead he made his way down to the Common Room and out the door, where he took an immediate right and

walked to the next door. After knocking on it he only had to wait a minute before Lilith opened the door. "It's time. Dad's requesting Halstead and the rest of you. The Healers said he doesn't have too much longer." Lilith nodded once and called the others to follow.

The group of them made their way silently to the ground floor only to find not just the other Marauders but Dumbledore with McGonagall to the left and behind him. "Good Afternoon, Mr. Potter. Might I ask where you and the others are headed on his fine day?"

James looked back to the other six that were going with him and sighed. Nothing was ever easy with them along, but duty was duty. "The Ravenshire Survivors and myself have been called to the bedside of Charles and Grace Potter, Lord and Lady of the Ancient and Noble House of Potter. As the healers do not expect them to last much longer, we need to go." One look and it was easy to see that Dumbledore would not let them go so easily.

In fact, Dumbledore's twinkling increased even as the old man's expression turned sad. "I'm sorry to hear about the eminent demise of Lord Potter. School rules of course allow family members to attend the passing of an immediate relation, but none of those six are immediately related to Lord Potter, so I'm afraid I can't allow them to leave with you." James just knew this was going to go badly, but still he had to push forward.

"Be that as it may, Lord Charles Potter has called upon them to attend him directly. You have no right to interfere with what is an internal house matter. Please stand aside." Even as he said that he realized that Dumbledore had no intention of letting them go.

"I'm afraid I can't," Dumbledore replied sadly. "Hogwarts rules state that students can only leave with the approval of the Headmaster, and I can't in all good conscience give them a pass to leave when it isn't their family that's dying. It could be considered an insult to other grieving families."

James shook his head and had to wonder just what the headmaster was trying to do. He didn't want to go all out for these people, but he

feared he had no choice. "Sir, I'm afraid you don't have a say in this matter. This is official business of the Ancient and Noble House of Potter to the vassal houses of Penwell, Galway, Leedham, Lambeth and Whitcomb. According to the by laws of the school you have no choice but to release them, as they are entitled to carry out their family business. This is such a case."

Professor McGonagall nodded once as she was very well familiar with the by laws in question. "Professor Dumbledore, I fear Mr. Potter is right," she said to her boss.

Dumbledore gave the transfiguration professor an unreadable look before turning back to James. He tried not to show his preparations should it come to spells for them to escape, all the while thankful Halstead and Lilith moved up. He may not have known exactly what to think of them, but he did at least recognize they were decent fighters in their own rights. It was then he realized that Dumbledore was stretching for time and decided to end it. "We'll be gone for at least three days, Professor. Would it be too much trouble to have Mr. Black and Miss Evans on call? There is unfinished business between those two and the House of Potter that will be called to the forefront upon the passing of Lord and Lady Potter."

Dumbledore opened his mouth to respond but was once again cut off by his deputy, "No, it would not be any trouble at all, Mr. Potter. Just floo me when you need them."

James spared a glance over to the two people in question. Sirius smiled sadly but gave James a nod while Lily looked torn between indignation and support. But she still smiled at James, which seemed to set his mind at ease. He let go of the breath he was holding and said, "Thank you Professor. If this goes over a week, I'll let you know." A firm nod from the younger of the two professors a moment later and the seven were on their way.

A total of ten minutes later found the group in Potter Manor where Dobby awaited them. "James Potter sir, your parents are awake and waiting for you. You and Halstead Pennywell sir are to follow Dobby

to their room.” James nodded and motioned for the elf to lead on while quietly contemplating everything.

As they ascended the rich carpeted stairway Halstead cleared his throat. “Are you okay James?” the older boy asked.

James stopped and turned toward the young man and looked at him for a moment. “My father is dying, Halstead, or whoever you are. You’re hiding something, I know it. I don’t know if what you’re hiding will help them, but right now I find myself rather angry with you. You claim to be from the future, you have all this knowledge of what will happen, but you don’t do anything with it. And for the life of me I can’t quite figure out why. So I’m not exactly happy with you or your group right now. Until you stop with-holding secrets and start giving me answers, then don’t expect me to be really happy with any of you. And Merlin help you if I find you could have done something to prevent this.”

James almost winced at the haunted, horrified face the older young man was displaying. Whatever he said struck a cord, and given how he was feeling his mind went toward the last sentence of that. He started to get even angrier and was about ready to strike out when the unspeakable spoke, “No, there’s nothing I could have done to save either one of them. They’ll die soon, and nothing can be done to prevent it. I’m sorry James, I wish there was something I could do...”

James snorted at this and folded his arms over his chest, “Really? Somehow I find that hard to believe.” What happened next shocked James. He thought the young man from the future would go for a wand. He was even prepared for a shouting match. But he was completely unprepared for the look of despair that filled the man’s face. Nor was he prepared when the young man pushed him out of the way and ran upstairs. He could do nothing else but turn and follow the young man as he marched upstairs toward his parents’ room.

Halstead beat him into the room, and to the foot of the bed. James nearly rushed the man when he noticed the unspeakable had a wand pointed at them. The only thing that stopped him was that he recognized the spell being cast as a diagnostic spell. That was

followed by another spell and yet another, despite Charles telling the younger man to stop. Finally one spell seemed to react differently than the others, causing both old man and younger man to pause. James stood there dumbfounded when Halstead's face twisted from distraught panic to anger. Even the medi-wizard in the room seemed to gasp in disbelief. "What is it?" James whispered to the healer.

"Mr. Penwell just cast a very little known curse detection spell. It just pinged," the healer returned in a whisper as if saying anything would cause disaster. Halstead in the meantime started to chant a longer spell over the both of them, which caused lines to spring into life connecting the old couple to each other and to James. James was watching the lines form and was surprised when a line seemed to connect James to Halstead in the same manner that Charles and Grace were connected to James. Suddenly the door opened and a gasp echoed as Haleigh stood in the doorway.

"Contact Jason," Halstead said succinctly. Just as he said that a red and gold phoenix burst into existence in the room, followed by a white and blue one. Haleigh reached up and grabbed the tail feathers of the red and gold and disappeared in a ball of flame. The white and blue phoenix settled on the foot board of the elderly couple and started to sing. This stopped James from speaking up and demanding to know what was going on, instead filling him with patience and some peace.

Instead James took a couple of steps forward and noticed another line leading from his parents down through the floor. Then he blinked again as he recognized two lines, not one. One was a pale yellow but it was dwarfed and almost hidden by the thicker black one that almost over-lapped it. Just as James reached out for it another flash of flame rattled the objects in the room, revealing a man in dark grey robes. "I would not touch that if I were you," the man said as he knelt down. "Charles, do you have a safe in this direction?"

James wanted to snap at the man to leave his father alone. The dying man looked so drained, so frail he couldn't help but to be protective. But his father tried to sit up, to look at the line and gasped out, "Yes. Halstead and James know where it is." Halstead rushed over to

support the man and at the same time admonish him from over-exerting himself.

“James, I have to maintain the spell. Will you show Jason to the vault?” the teen from the future asked the younger.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” James replied stubbornly. Those vaults were secret for a reason, and he was beyond upset that Halstead knew of it in the first place, even if he is a future Potter. He would have to instill into his child a better sense of propriety in hopes it would transfer down.

James was startled by the response, which was to have Haleigh in his face. “If you are quite done acting like a child,” the red-headed young woman snarled an inch away from his face. “I swear you’re acting worse than Ryan ever did. First you lay a guilt trip on Halstead despite his repeated attempts to explain what we’re doing to you. Attempts he did not owe you by the way. Attempts we were not in total agreement should have been made in the first place. He has undertaken great personal risk in letting you know half of what he’s told you. But that’s not enough is it? No, as long as you don’t know everything you’re going to act like a three year old that didn’t get the candy they wanted...”

“Herm... Haleigh! Enough,” Halstead gasped. James snapped his head over to the man that snapped at her to tell him to stay out of it and paled at the sight. Halstead looked frail and weak, and he was looking worse by the minute. “Now is not the time. Please go see what it is, and bring it here.”

Haleigh looked like she was about to snap at Halstead, but bit it off. Instead she snapped her head back to James and said, “This is not over. But he’s right. Show me and Jason where the vault is if you want to have any chance to save your parents.” There was something wrong in her face, something James wasn’t sure he liked, but the need to save his parents won out.

Waving his hand to get the other two to follow him, he walked back down to the ground floor and into his father’s study. He could see the

lines even here. They were stretching to a picture behind and to the left of his father's desk, one that contained a picture of Vernon Potter, James' great-great-great grandfather. He stopped them both about five feet away from the man-sized portrait and whispered, "Clay turns the world." The man in the portrait nodded and asked for additional clearances, which James gave both Jason and Haleigh temporary clearances each. The man nodded and the portrait swung to the left, exposing a large chamber. The lines extended into the room and ended at a pair of books on the pedestal in the centre of the room, only one had James seen before. "This is odd..."

"Don't recognize that book?" Haleigh asked, indicating the book with the black line. James nodded numbly once, which was enough for the witch. She pulled her wand and started several incantations while Jason stepped through. "Don't touch it. It's set to trigger on touch," Haleigh said. "I don't recognize the specific spells." James simply stood there and watched while Jason and Haleigh ran several tests, followed by a quick search for a blanket. "We can't levitate it, and we can't touch it. We'll have to sweep the blanket under it and pull it out that way. James, can you pick up the Potter Grimore and keep it out of the way without touching the other book?" At James' nod she motioned him forward to do just that. It took some work but finally they had the unknown book suspended in a blanket-basket between Jason and Haleigh. The lines blinked out as they left the vault and headed upstairs.

When they returned to the master bedroom suite they found Harry being helped to the chair by Lilith and the healer. He looked very drained to James, which given what he knew about Halstead's power said quite a bit about the spell's power. Even so Halstead downed the Pepper Up potion he was given before turning his attention to the book. As James and Haleigh set the book down in front of him Halstead motioned for Haleigh toward the book. James then watched as Haleigh pulled out her wand and began a rather long chanting incantation on the book itself. It "glowed" deep black with several multi-coloured specks as the spell continued. But as James could in no way know just what it meant he kept watch on the book instead. Finally he was snapped out of his reticence by Haleigh's voice. "Damn, the book is cursed by a spell I've never seen before. I can

figure out rather easily what it does, and I can try to break it, but there's nothing else I can do."

"Do you think a more experienced Arithmancer can do something more?" Jason asked, apparently used to the young witch's demeanour.

Haleigh shook her head as she finished the her last spell. "No. The spell is resistant to revealing charms, and I'm pouring as much energy into this one as I can and still only getting partial data. I can break it, but I'll need help to do so."

Lilith looked over at Harry for a moment before shrugging and walking over to Haleigh. James noted the 'it cannot be helped' look on her face, and wondered not for the first time what she was thinking. But if none of the other Marauders, including Moony could figure that out, he as not going to be able to either. He watched as the two young women had a quiet conversation before they turned their wands on the book, each one concentrating very hard and chanting softly. James in the meantime turned his gaze upon his parents, and was shocked at what he saw.

For some reason instead of getting stronger, the elderly couple seemed to be getting weaker. They were becoming more pale and more gaunt with each passing moment. His father coughed as the book flashed, and quickly fell into a coughing fit as it flashed again. James tried to comfort his parents but the coughs were racking his body too badly and in the end all he could do was pat his father's back. The black aura around the book flashed once, then died, sending both of his parents into convulsions. Gwenyth ran up and started to try to help Grace while Halstead tried to work around him. All James could do is sit there and watch as his parents seemed to fade even farther.

Finally the spasms and the coughing fits ended, and the bodies of the elderly couple fell back into the persons trying to help them. They looked to be just a step away from death, breathing with painfully slow raspy breaths that sounded like the act of breathing alone would do them in. "What the bloody hell did you do?" James snarled, looking directly at Halstead.

“The book was killing them, and torturing them at the same time,” Halstead returned, shaking his head. “It may have been true that they would have lived longer if we hadn’t broken the spell, but they would have been in a lot more pain for a lot longer if we hadn’t done anything.”

James was about to snap again at Halstead but noticed a definite sense of loss in the other teen’s face. A part of him wanted to call him out for being a self-centred arrogant prick, but the other part wanted to understand more. “I don’t understand you,” James finally said quietly. “I don’t get you at all. You hold yourself aloof and above us all, and you know so much more than us. But you don’t /do/ anything with it. And I’m not the only one that sees it. Sirius, Remus, and Evans see it. Hell, Peter sees it. Even now, you simply did what you did without explaining to me, his next of kin, why. You didn’t explain why you weren’t doing anything, and then you barely explain why you did what you did. Do you even realize you’re acting as bad as the Headmaster?”

Several gasps were heard throughout the room, mainly from all of Halstead’s friends. If James could have looked away from Halstead he would have seen three of those friends step back while his two mates each reached out for him. But instead James was caught in the cold glare of Halstead Penwell. He could feel the righteous anger rolling off of the unspeakable, and he knew he had taken a step too far. This was confirmed in Halstead’s response, “I am nothing like that old manipulative bastard. No, I may not tell you everything, James, but I don’t make your decisions for you or run your life or restrict your movements. No, I don’t tell you everything. First of all several magical oaths I have taken prevent me from doing so. Second, to tell you everything you want to know could mean that I would never be born. You have no idea what it is like to walk that tightrope, James. None. Do you think I enjoy watching them die? Hell no. I hate it. But at the same time it’s all I can do.”

“I think you have some gall to call Halstead arrogant,” Lilith took up from Halstead. “I have seen you walk around like you own the place more times than I can count. Even now, when you told us what you

really feel, you felt like we owe you a detailed report about the future. Don't you realize that telling you that would effectively remove your choices, your free will? Oh, you could say that you would be forewarned and could stop the bad things. But what do you change? How do you know what to change? We have tools you don't, tools you can't understand. But we still fumble around sometimes, risking everything we know. Can you do that when you can't even stop bullying one man for the person you profess to love?"

James was floored. Of all the six teens that came from the future, Lilith was the weirdest yet the most even keeled of the group. Rarely did he see her as angry as she was now. At the same time he felt there was something... off about her mood, off from her normal mood that is. It felt like he was about to tap-dance on her last nerve, and if he did he'd be the focus of the pain he could see within her. She looked intensely angered, an anger that comes from profound pain and sadness. Suddenly Lily's face flashed into view. It was a memory from when Severus called her a mudblood. He could see a part of her die as he heard his voice say that word again. At the same time he could feel the humiliation, rage, and hopelessness in Severus voice. He knew then Severus had lashed out at the closest available person: Lily. He could see a friendship die then, something he did not see before even when they pointed it out to him. He could see it die now, because of him, because of his arrogance. He remembered what Halstead told him, then and now. He remembered what Lilith said, and discovered who was the most arrogant person in the room. Finally he was brought back to reality, but he could not face Lilith or anyone else. He looked down to the ground and tried to blink back the tears as he said, "I'm sorry."

"It's about time," another man's voice whispered into the room. James' head snapped toward the sound of the voice to see his father being propped up by Halstead. Halstead looked very sad, near tears even. And he looked concerned, and for more than the old man in his arms. "I had hoped I'd see the day when you realized what you were doing. I just hope you can still win that red-head you care for so much." The last word kicked off a coughing fit that spewed blood on the covers.

Halstead's look went from sad and concerned to anguished as he tried to rub the man's back to calm him down. Charles waved the hand away and with great effort got the coughing under control. "It's too late grandson, that book did its damage," he said as he took Halstead's hand. Wait, GRANDSON? James could only look at the young man with his mouth on the floor as the old man strained to chuckle, "Yes, you heard me right son. I had hoped to live until they graduated, so they could tell you in their own way and time, but it's too late now. And before you yell at them, I wouldn't have made it anyway. At least this way, I'll have been declared dead due to natural causes, and you have reason enough to continue your protections."

The others in the room, save Haleigh, looked floored and lost, but for obviously different reasons. Halstead simply hugged his grandfather and tried to make him comfortable. "I'm sorry grandpa, there's only so much I could do."

The old man had another coughing fit that spilled more blood everywhere while his wife took over, her voice weak and almost gone. "We know baby. My only regret is that I didn't have the time to get to know you and your wives better." Lilith staggered over to her side and took her hand, breaking down into sobbing tears. Haleigh hugged the woman closer to her as tears rolled down her cheeks. Grace just smiled lovingly and admonished them, "Come now, don't cry. We'll see each other again. In the meantime I'll watch over you all. I... love... yooouuuu..." Grace's voice faded off wither her last breath, leaving that loving smile on her face.

The bottom threatened to drop out of James' world just then as he realized his mother had passed on. His father had finally stopped coughing, though his breathing now was about the same as Grace's. The old man was holding on with willpower alone as he weakly motioned James to him. James came up and took his father's hand, which felt so limp. He could remember his father's hand from when he was younger, it felt so strong then. The weakness in his father's had now nearly broke him, but the concentrated look on Charles' face held him together. "I hereby... decree... James Charles Potter... Lord of... Ancient... and... Noble House... of Potter. So mote it be. Take care... obligations. I... hereby decree... Harry James Potter... Duke... of Royal Duchy... of Gryffindor. So mote it be. Take care... family. I

love you both,” The last word came out as the last breath left the old man’s body, another smile on his face.

James looked into Halstead... no, Harry’s eyes as he placed his father’s hand flat on the cushion beside his body. Harry joined him, resting the body of the late Potter Lord on the bed in state so he could also stand up. Together they took out their wands and pointed them straight up in the air, Harry’s eyes prompting James to start. “I, James Charles Potter, do hereby accept the mantle of Lord of the Ancient and Noble House of Potter. I will uphold all debts, obligations, offers, and traditions of My Ancient and Noble House, and will defend it, and the people under it, against all who would do it or its allies harm. I swear this on my life, my honour, and my soul, so mote it be!” A golden nimbus surrounded James as he heard several gonging chimes throughout the Manor. A brief gold light surrounded Charles’ body before it shot off into James, threatening to knock him down, but he held fast. Slowly the golden light faded, leaving a feeling of acceptance in the air.

Harry nodded to James as he brought his wand first to his heart, then pointed it at Haleigh and Lilith before pointing it up in the air, “I, Harry James Potter, last of the Royal House of Gryffindor, do hereby accept the mantle of Duke of the Royal Line of Gryffindor. I swear to uphold the laws and rules of my House, and will defend it, the other founders, and all of the Magical Commonwealth, including the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, against any and all who seek to do it harm. I swear to continue to fight the Dark as my ancestors before me in the name of the Queen, the Lord and Lady, and Country. So mote it be.” A red and gold nimbus formed around Harry as the acceptance of the oath took hold, causing another set of chimes to go off in the distance. Once everything had settled down again he turned toward Haleigh and Lilith. “Luna, please come here.”

Lilith looked up, tears streaming down her face even as the look of shock formed there. She looked over at Haleigh who gave her a smile and told her to go. Haleigh shook her head in response and pushed the other woman with her foot in what was obviously an insistence that she go. It took a few minutes, but Lilith/Luna conceded defeat, even if she did not look entirely happy about it. Still she went and knelt before Harry, who rested the tip of his wand on her head.

“Do you, Luna Lovegood, agree to stay by my side, help lead my house, and support its head and any further members from now until you pass from this earth?”

“I do.”

“Then I declare you Luna-Lovegood-Gryffindor, Lady of the Duchy of Gryffindor. Though your sister wife may call you equal, know that there is no other than her or myself that equals you. So mote it be.” Luna broke down into sobbing tears as the nimbus faded from her body, causing Harry to scoop her up into his arms. She seemed conflicted, both struggling to get away and at the same time afraid to let go. Haleigh stood up and walked over, kissed Luna softly on her forehead, then started to take the younger witch from her husband’s arms. “I’ve got her Harry. I’ll take care of her while you finish your work here. Just join us as soon as you can, okay?” With her husband’s non-verbal agreement, she took the younger witch in her arms, kissed her on the mouth with a warm, closed-mouth kiss, and carried her off.

James tilted his head a moment in confusion as he watched Haleigh and Li... Luna leave. “Why didn’t you proclaim Haleigh as Lady Gryffindor as well? You’re bound to both of them.”

Harry sighed and turned toward James, his eyes warring between hidden pain and duty. “Because she is to be Duchess Ravenclaw. She holds a title in her own right, higher than the one I just gave Luna. We’ve talked it over, and even though Luna did not fully agree, even she saw the need to keep the lines separate so that the line of Ravenclaw can continue in name. They’ll be brother and sister houses from our children’s generation on out, but legally we need the power of keeping the Houses separate on paper can give us, even if we’re one in the state of marriage.”

James sighed and wondered for the first time what happened in the future that made everything so bad that they would have to go through all they did. But still he had to admit they were right about having to keep secrets, even when it so obviously tortured them

inside. Finally he turned toward his son, who was looking at him pensively. "Well, we've got some work to do. Perhaps we should get it started. That way you can get back to your ladies as soon as possible." With Harry's quiet nod they turned and headed out of the door.

Harry's Suite Hermione's POV

Hermione carried Luna back to their suite, non-verbally asking for time alone from the other members as she went. Finally when they entered the suite she called an elf for some hot chocolate. The elf nodded and disappeared, allowing Hermione to sit down with her wife on the nearest duvet. She tried to reach into the younger witch's mind to give comfort, but the witch was locked into some kind of memory loop that felt painful even to her. The first generation witch knew she'd be lost if she tried to enter her love's mind when she was in such a state, so she pushed back her own sense of loss to be there for her bond mate.

Hermione simply held the younger witch to her, using soft caresses and soothing sounds as her shoulder got wet from the young woman's tears. But her wetness didn't bother her at all, given that Luna had stood so strong for them over the now year and a half that they been here. In one sense, she owed her bond mate her own sanity and sense of self worth many times over. The bond was difficult enough to accept with Harry, given his prior apparent lack of interest, but as she told them early on in the relationship, accepting another woman that close was something else entirely.

Indeed, it had taken this long for Hermione to be comfortable holding Luna in this intimate way, even if love was not a problem, which it wasn't. Her problem was over-coming her own fears and lack of sense of self worth, born from her infant school days and strengthened through junior school. Hogwarts was a different story, with some strengthening and some weakening of that belief, at least at Hogwarts she had friends. But even there she was largely ostracised due to her thirst for knowledge, her "bossy" demeanour, and her birth status. All those years of shunning had left their mark on

her, in more ways than one. She had to fight for everything, so she held on to her beliefs no matter what. That's what made this triumvirate bond so hard for her, it challenged and shattered her long-held beliefs.

She spent much of the first nine to twelve months feeling rather set adrift, with only Harry and Luna for anchors. Harry, Merlin bless him, tried his best to be supportive and helpful, but he simply did not understand what a teenage girl went through or felt. Moreover, he was fighting his own inner battles and demons, which even Hermione had to admit were at least a couple of orders of magnitude worse than hers. Hermione had wondered for the longest time how on earth Luna could hold on without breaking down on her own with the two of them adrift as they were. She knew how Harry survived and started healing: his grandfather. The old man had provided Harry with a much needed ear and anchor, giving him room for true healing. This allowed Harry to be there for them, though up until now it was primarily her. She was thankful for that, and she could tell now she had another reason for being thankful for that relief.

So many months of being strong apparently took a lot out of Luna, for her to break like this now. The young girl now had everything she wanted, and she was even the Duchess of Gryffindor, but the death of Harry's grandmother seemed to have destroyed her. And Hermione couldn't figure out why. Sure, Luna grew up with only her father, because her mother... That's when it hit her. Her mother! Luna must have seen the death and instantly linked it to her mother! "Luna, it's okay. Harry's grandmother is in a better place right now," she whispered softly as she kissed the younger girl's temple.

"I... I couldn't save her! Just like I couldn't save mummy!" the younger girl wailed. Hermione held her closer and started to rub her back softly as Luna tightened her own hug.

Hermione fought back the wince from the slight pain of the hug, instead focusing on hugging her love as tightly as she could. "I know Luna. It hurts, oh Merlin it hurts. Just let it out, Darling. Don't keep it held within you, if you want to, scream as much as you want. I'm here for you." Luna pressed against her, snuggling so close as to almost join her as she sobbed. It took a good half hour at least for Luna to

cry herself out, and when she drew back her face was red and her eyes swollen from all the tears.

Hermione let the silent tears she had been crying continue to fall as she reached up and kissed the corner of Luna's mouth softly. "I know you said it to me before, but I wish I could take away your pain," she whispered quietly. "I never lost my parents until just before we left, and there's a chance I haven't yet when we return. But I'll tell you this, I thank my lucky stars that you're in my life. I know I was reticent at first, but now that we've grown together over this time, I don't know what I would have done if you weren't there. You've been so strong Luna. So very strong for so very long. In some ways, I wish I could be more like you. But I'm not," she said, placing her finger on the other girl's mouth. "Oh, I know I'm strong in some ways, but in others I've lived a rather sheltered life. Compared to yours and Harry's problems, mine really aren't that bad."

"Bollocks," Luna said around Hermione's finger. "You're plenty strong. You've faced all sorts of things with Harry that I never had, including fully grown mountain trolls."

Hermione chuckled at this and shook her head. "Surprisingly enough, physical danger doesn't scare me as much. I'm too much a Gryffindor for that. But what does scare me is emotional danger. That you and Harry faced so much and for so long. Until recently, I know I would have folded if I had a quarter of your problems, or Harry's. But over this past year and a half, with all the uncertainty, all the betrayal, all the sense of loss of security that I've gone through, you have been there Luna. You've helped ease my pain when I felt like my heart was going to bleed to death. You helped me up when I fell. Even when we three raged from regaining our memories, you grounded me, kept me from pulling a Harry and charging to hex Dumbledore straight off. You showed me what it meant to be strong. I love you Luna, for that as well as for many other reasons."

Luna appeared floored, hopeful, and vulnerable, all at the same time. Her eyes were shimmering through their redness as she stared Hermione deep within. Hermione felt like Luna was peering deep down into her very soul, trying to find proof for what she so desperately wanted to believe. "Y... you ... love me?"

Hermione's heart broke once again at the plea in Luna's voice. Protection warred with Vengeance deep within her heart. She wanted to go back to the future and hex every single Ravenclaw there was for all that they had done to this girl. Oh, Luna never showed how much the ridicule and spitefulness of her house hurt, but Hermione could see each and every word seared into the scars of her soul. It made her want to shelter the girl away from the world, only letting Harry in and keeping everyone and everything else out. But she couldn't. No matter how much she wished she could, she couldn't. "Yes, I love you Luna. I can't fight it any more. I'm tired of fighting it. I've been tired of fighting it for so long. So no more fighting these feelings. Now I'll do for you what you did for me. I wish I could take away your pain. I wish I could shelter you from the rest of the world, but I can't. But what I can do is be here for you. I can help you live on. I can listen to your dreams, your fears. I can love you. And I can help you stand. Whatever you want Luna, whatever you need. You've got it. You and Harry both. Let me be the strong one for once. You, me, Harry, we're one. No one is stronger than the other two. But together we make more than the sum of us. Together, we three can do anything. Together, not even the Dumbledores can stop us. So go ahead, cry. Wail and do what you must. I'll help you. I'll be there for you. Just as you'll be there for Harry."

"Actually, we all need to be there for each other," Harry's strained and raspy voice echoed into the sitting room. "We'll all draw our strength from each other."

Hermione looked up into the tear streaked face of her male bond mate and held her arm open for him to join them. Luna did the same, and both of them braced themselves for Harry who threw himself into their arms. Together the three of them spent all night crying in each others' arms, taking solace from each other, and relying on each others' strengths to overcome their individual weakness. The three became one, finally. And no more would anyone tear them apart. This they promised each other, even as they knew Dumbledore would make his next move soon.

Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry
Scotland

Entry Hall

Ginny's POV

Six months had passed since the day the eldest Potters had died, and while the six of them returned to school with the regular students, it was another month before James had returned. And during that time, even Sirius could see Dumbledore's not-so-subtle attempts at manipulation against them. They weren't even back for two hours before McGonagall called them into the Headmaster's office. At first the old man was very conciliatory and respectful about the loss, but that was soon replaced with an offer/requirement of protection for them. He began by reminding them of the terms of their emancipation, specifically the part requiring them to have a House that would protect them. Ginny was appalled, and angered, by the smug look hidden behind a thin veil of concern for them. But she cheered when Harry pointed out that all but two of them were now of age, and the last two, Ginny and Luna, had family that was of age. Besides, the House of Potter still stood for them.

Dumbledore proved himself to be the king of manipulation by resorting to emotional pleas and guilt trips. He sited the death of the late Charles and Grace Potter as more than sufficient reason as to why James could not take over what his father started. If he could, surely he would have been there now? Neville at this point squeezed her hand briefly and then stepped forward before reminding Dumbledore that James was only a floo away, and if absolutely necessary there were other ways of communicating as well. And no, they would not be sharing the manner of this communication with Dumbledore, for it was none of his business.

At this point Dumbledore got angry and told them that as Chief Warlock he found that was not good enough. He then told them he'd seek a ruling to place them under his watch since they were obviously not capable of making sound decisions for themselves. Ron, bless his heart, stepped forward with Neville and told Dumbledore that since four of them were of age he couldn't do that legally. Once a witch or wizard reached 17, they could not have their legal, adult rights taken away from them without being convicted of a crime. Then Hermione stepped forward and reminded him that he could not take Luna away because they were legally married, and thus out of his

reach. As far as Ginny was concerned, she had accepted Neville's proposal of marriage herself not that long prior, so she could not be taken away from them either.

This would have sparked a long argument between them and Dumbledore, but McGonagall stepped in and reminded the Headmaster that they had the upper hand legally. Another couple of moments were wasted watching a staring contest/non-verbal communication between the two administrators before Dumbledore expressed his sorrow over their distrust. But still he could not do anything, for they were right. He reminded them that his door was always open, then let them go on their way.

But that was not the end of the fights between the students and the Headmaster. Over the last six months there were numerous attempts on their lives, all attributed to the war outside heating up. Harry's scar was blissfully quiet as the connection between Voldemort and Harry had not been established yet. But even so, they all could easily tell that fully half to three quarters of the attempts on their lives came from inside the school, not without. They had wound up spending more time practising defence and other unspeakable skills than actual studying for N.E.W.T.'s, just so they could survive. It was to the point for the last month or so that Ginny was thankful they were far enough ahead of their courses that they only really needed a brief revision.

That, predictably, did not stop Hermione from nearly panicking though. Ginny swore sometimes that woman had an over-achiever complex at least a mile long by half a mile wide. This appeared to be especially true when it came to arithmetician and ancient runes, where Hermione spent the most time studying the most obscure things. Even Luna could barely keep up with her there, so Ginny didn't even try. Besides, as she found out Hermione was shooting to be a technomancer as well as an arithmancer, whereas Ginny's desires took her more the psychological direction into the realm of mind healing. Thus she was able to give advice to Harry and Luna on how to get her to relax when she started to go over board.

Finally the N.E.W.T.'s arrived, and the six threw themselves into the test. The exam results for each test were posted the next day after

completion, and so far they all had done very well. There was only one test remaining: Defence. This was the one that made the six of them the most nervous, for each of them had decided they would try for the optional Mastery application test in that subject. It was a little known rule within the testing authority that the top five percent of the students in the UK in any one subject could opt to take the Master application test instead of their N.E.W.T.'s . Requests had to be made by Easter break so as to allow time for the test administrators to set up the course. Of course, the Master application test was at least ten times harder than the regular N.E.W.T. test, and none of the schools in England taught more than what was necessary to pass the N.E.W.T., so this option was rarely exercised. To have six applicants ask to do so at once was unheard of. But yet they each had put in the application for Defence Master, a first in history. Thus they were standing in the entry hall watching as their classmates entered the great hall one at a time to take their tests, knowing they would be last and headed for another direction entirely.

“We’ve come a long way, haven’t we?” Ginny heard Luna’s voice whisper behind her. “And in a very short amount of time. I don’t think event the Rumpling Drackmires could have caused us to imagine ourselves here, now.”

Ginny had to smile at Luna’s comment. Oh, she knew that many of Luna’s creatures were actually real, being of the fairy kingdoms, but she also knew Luna used her knowledge to put up a buffer of sorts between her and the rest of the world that would cause her pain. After all, people hurt “Loony” Lovegood, but all of it never applied to Luna Lovegood Still, she had come a long way from Christmas break and her breakdown. At first she was undeniably shaken loose of her emotional anchors, but Harry and Hermione (more Hermione than Harry) slowly but surely put her back together again. Ginny hoped never to have to witness that again. “Yeah, we have. Who would have thought we’d wind up where we are now, with the people we are with now. I know I never really considered it.”

Luna stepped forward and placed her hand on Ginny’s shoulder and gave her a warm squeeze. “Regrets?”

Ginny answered that with a firm negative head shake accompanied with a guttural “Uh uh.” Ginny turned her head up to look into Luna’s now hazel eyes and smiled. “None whatsoever. Yeah, I had a crush on a certain brown-eyed boy for the longest time, but I knew before our fourth year that I wasn’t right for him. I was meant to be more of a confidant, someone with similar experiences that could understand what he went through, than a lover. So I gave up, stepped back, and worked to support him. I didn’t know where I was headed or who I’d be with, and it was scary. But I knew that Halstead needed someone more like Haleigh, even if she wasn’t everything that he needed. Then I started watching you, and it sort of clicked, you know?”

Luna smiled dreamily as her eyes glanced over to her mates. They both smiled briefly but lovingly at her before turning back to another student who was asking for last minute help. “If I’m jealous of anything, it’s that closeness you share,” Ginny breathed. Luna turned her head with a raised brow toward Ginny, but let her continue speaking, “I can’t take either of your places, and I don’t want to. I love Nathan. It took me a long time to see him for what he was, but I eventually did, and am richer for it. No, what I wish is that I could share something like what you share with them with my Nathan. We’re close, don’t get me wrong. We’re as close as two people could be and not be joined at the hip. In many ways we compliment each other, each compensating for each other’s weaknesses. He gives me strength to stand tall no matter what, and he says I give him confidence. I don’t see that, but hey. Still, it’s not what you got with them.”

Luna pulled Ginny into a hug, holding on to her for a few moments. “You two will get there someday, Gwen. I know you will,” Lilith said with a smile. “You just have to travel a different road, and it won’t be easy. But then, the road we took wasn’t easy for us either.” Luna looked a little sad at that last comment, almost as if she regretted something.

Ginny gave her old friend a squeeze before pulling back, “But the events that happened made you who you are now, Lilith. Those events will just make you that much stronger.”

Lilith gave her a sad smile as her dreaminess somewhat faded away. "I've lost so much, Gwentyth. And for a long time I had nothing or no one to lean on. They make it easier by being there, but still I have to learn how to lean on them. It's not easy. And sometimes I wonder what would happen if one of them died. Would I survive it?"

This struck Ginny hard. She knew that traditionally a soul-bonded couple died together, or at least within hours of each other. But little if nothing was ever known about soul-bounded triangles. If one was lost, would the other two die? Or would they want to live? "I don't know Lilith," she finally said quietly. "But it's better to focus on making sure that doesn't happen than to wonder what would happen if it does. 'What ifs' like that are insidious, and make you focus too much on that, forgetting how to live in the now. I think you need to push it to the back of your mind and confront it a bit more slowly. Focus on the present, especially since it looks like we're up next."

Indeed, the person Harry and Hermione were tutoring had been called in, leaving the six of them in the main hall. True to plans, ten minutes later the testers moved out of the Great Hall and toward them. Griselda Marchbanks took a step forward and said, "Your challenge is out on the quidditch pitch. You'll all be tested at the same time . . ."

The old woman was interrupted by a series of loud quick steps from the staircase with an authoritative shout of "WAIT!"

The old woman was clearly not impressed by the interruption and glared at the Headmaster as he joined the group. "What do you want Headmaster Dumbledore?" The other examiners didn't look too happy either. Instead they looked rather put out that the old man was interfering with the exams.

"As de facto Guardian of these six children, I cannot allow them to take the Master challenge," the manipulative old bastard declared with an act of finality. "In fact, I must demand their N.E.W.T. testing cease now, so they can go through some remedial work here."

Ginny wasn't the only person in her group livid at this proclamation, not by a long shot. Even in her moment of rage she could see Harry

and his ladies almost foaming at the mouths and shaking in outrage over the gall of the man. But Harry had apparently learned his political lessons well and quickly assumed a cool, calm, and collected demeanour, "You are not our guardian, Headmaster Dumbledore. As we explained to you in January, four of us are legal adults, and the other two are bound irrevocably to people who are. You have no basis to call us anything but our Headmaster, and that ends as soon as we take the last N.E.W.T. examination, or in this case our Master Application Exam. All the required signatures were on our application forms, including yours. So why are you trying to stop us now?"

"Halstead my boy," Albus started, "I rather hesitate to say this, but you don't recognize the dangers that await you all out there. But I fear that is our fault for getting off on the wrong foot with you, thus we could not teach you what you needed. There's a war going on out there my boy, and taking this examination is just going to provoke the same people who tried to kill you earlier. Surely you can see the need to be fully prepared. Another year should do it. Can you please just trust us?"

"On the contrary headmaster," Ginny decided to interrupt. "We're fully aware of the dangers of the outside world. It's why no one knows where we're going after we leave here."

"And that still does not answer why you're trying to claim guardianship over us. Why is that professor?" Hermione asked assertively.

"I am Headmaster of this school, and therefore in loco parentis for any student here, that gives me a de facto guardianship," the old man replied.

"Preposterous!" Griselda interjected. "That's only over Muggle-born children who don't have sponsoring families under the age of 17. None of these children fit that bill, not even the 16 year olds. Furthermore, you already approved this for them. Examination regulations clearly state once approval has been given, it cannot be taken away. Now stand aside Dumbledore, and let us get on with the test."

“It is imperative they do not take this test. They’ll be targets for the dark forces if they do,” Dumbledore pleaded for the apparent last time. His face looked concerned, but Ginny could tell it was false. But what was he after then?

“For the last time stand aside, Headmaster.”

Dumbledore stood aside at the old woman’s final order and watched as the group was led away and given their instructions. Ginny found it odd the old man did not follow to continue to try to talk them out of it and spared a glance back. For a brief moment, before she could see a self-satisfied grin come across his face. But he appeared to notice her looking in his direction a moment afterwards and schooled himself to look at her forlornly. She started to give him a hard expression when her name was called to catch up. Ginny then shrugged to herself and rushed to catch up with the others. They would be away from the old man soon enough.

Once they were at the pitch they were stopped so the rules could be explained. The pitch was enchanted much like the Tri-Wizard tournament’s final task, save there were six entrances all at different intervals around the maze. Each one of them would enter the maze and make their way to the centre. They had an hour to reach the centre, and scores would be given for speed, methods used, and least number of injuries accumulated. A rescue option was available, but it meant automatic failure of the exam, at which point a standard N.E.W.T. exam would be immediately given to the rescued party, assuming they were in any shape to take the exam right then. Otherwise they would have to wait until mid-August before they could take their N.E.W.T. They would have to wait another five years before they took their Master application exam again.

After they received their last minute instructions, the group split up and made their way around the maze to their starting points. Ginny’s was southern-most, pointing toward the Shrieking Shack. Slowly she concentrated on stretching her body to loosen her muscles while she waited. Finally the green light flashed above them, the signal to start. Drawing her wand, she entered the maze.

As she entered the maze it closed behind her and flashed blue. And while she could not recall them saying anything about the opening closing behind them, but then again they didn't say it wouldn't. Still, she held up her wand and muttered a revealing spell. The blue light of the spell traced along the corridor she was in to a point just beyond her sight. It was designed to catch both traps and disillusioned threats, as well as anything above her that could cause harm. Her strategy, which was mirrored by the other five, was simple: take it nice and easy, use the revealing spell as much as possible, and always keep her wits about her.

There was of course only one route she could take to complete this maze, and like Harry had done in his fourth year she made judicious use of her 'point me' spell to guide her. But she was starting to get a little worried as she had yet to run into any resistance, even after the first chime sounded. This maze was supposed to be filled with various obstacles: traps, monsters, and even a witch or wizard at the end that they were supposed to fight and subdue. But so far she found nothing, saw nothing. It began to worry her, so she stopped and put her back to the wall of foliage. She tapped a pin on her lapel and whispered, "Halstead?"

"Yes Ginny?"

"Have you come across any resistance yet?" Ginny asked, allowing some of her confusion to come through.

"No, as a matter of fact I haven't. Neither have Haleigh or Lilith. I take it you haven't either?"

Ginny sighed, she was afraid of this. She took a quick glance around to make sure there was nothing going on. "No, I haven't. There's something wrong here. Should we call in the proctors?"

There was a few moments of silence before Harry spoke again. "No, but keep your special toys on standby. We can determine who to blame later. But first we have to survive this."

Even though Harry couldn't see her, Ginny acknowledged the order with a nod. "Confirmed. Be careful." After cutting the link she opened a hidden pocket containing a portkey distributor. She would have called it a "portkey launcher" as it was spring loaded with a range of about three feet in a horizontal direction. It activated upon impact, and was used normally to send a subdued opponent to a destination while still in the heat of battle. It took her the better part of the summer to figure out how to use it right, but even she had to admit it was one of Hermione's better ideas. These portkeys would send people to the DOM holding cells, where other teams of unspeakables were on standby. More teams could be called in in situations like this, so any Death Eater trying to trick their opponents would not succeed.

Taking a deep breath, she steadied herself and started to walk forward. Another five minutes later she estimated she was at the half-way point, having made very good time, when her revealing spell pinged on five beings. They each flashed as the wave of light from the spell hit them, and as the final person flashed their obscuring spells dropped with a rain of hexes and curses. Ginny quickly dropped down to let them pass by before she rolled to a side. As she came up she fired three Reductos staggered with banishing charms not at her attackers, but at the ground before each cluster. As the rain of dirt grass and rock hurtled at her opponents she sprinted forward.

The Death Eater shields proved ineffectual against the solid debris, proving these were low-level opponents. Ginny kept her guard up though, as she knew there had to be someone of higher level around to lead them. So as she passed by the first two they were hit by two stunners each and a portkey. They both fell and vanished, leaving three others that she still needed to take care of. These three started firing blind toward the spot she was at, giving her the opportunity to take another one out. 'Three down and three to go,' she thought to herself.

The other two obvious opponents apparently had a little more experience than their compatriots did as they immediately took a step back and instantly brought up shields. Ginny herself pulled back a bit and conjured a short half-wall of marble in front of her. She then quickly ducked behind it as more spells started to rain upon her position, including unforgivable curses. The unspeakable knew she

could not stay there for long lest she gets trapped, so instead of firing off spells she shifted to her fox form and made a dash for the nearest ledge, keeping low to the ground.

Apparently the Death Eaters did not see her go into the hedge for the two flunkies continued to rain spells upon the short wall, slowly but surely demolishing it. Ginny worked her way to a point directly behind one of the death eaters and stepped out, transforming to human and she did. But even as she was shifting she was preparing a silent bone-breaker curse followed by a stunner that took the man down. She then immediately spun to her left as two killing curses hurtled through the air where she used to be. At last, the chief Death Eater made her appearance.

Ginny then rolled forward to avoid another series of spells before coming right up in front of the last stooge. She didn't even get a chance to fire though as she heard "Avada Kedavra" from behind her. Again she dodged, this time to the right, causing the killing curse to miss her and hit the Death Eater instead. Ginny quickly summoned a large chunk of debris from the wall to avoid a Cruciatus curse and finally saw an opening. Deciding to take it, she fired a bone shattering hex into her attacker's chest, only to snort when the woman took it with her off-wand arm. Given that was the first time the woman used that arm, Ginny knew this one would not be easy.

The youngest Weasley then started to cast several spells of her own toward her opponent even as she danced around the squad leader's barrage. They seemed rather evenly matched, which caused Ginny to worry a bit. Then she noticed her opponent's weakness: the woman did not move from her spot. She ducked and twisted, but did not move her feet. Smirking a little Ginny began her work as she started to get creative.

Intermixed amongst the spells Selene was casting, she first transfigured the dirt and grass below her opponent into sand. The Death Eater smirked at this and taunted her by saying, "You sure you're ready to face the real world? Sand isn't going to help you win this." But Ginny didn't comment nor did she stop. Instead she poured more and more magic into the transfiguration, deepening the amount of sand beneath the woman.

Finally once Ginny estimated the sand was at least as deep as her opponent was tall, Ginny started on the next stage of her plan. "Oh I'm ready, it's just that I don't hold you and your ilk as human is all," she responded with a sneer. Then she started using Aguamenti spells on her opponent, sometimes missing and sometimes not. This seemed to aggravate the woman to no end as the spells headed Ginny's direction got deadlier and deadlier. Ginny just smiled and continued to pour on the water while her opponent, in her hubris, just stood there and tried to kill her.

Finally the sand reached a saturation point but the Death Eater didn't even notice. All Ginny had to do now is hold out another minute, and the woman would be trapped. She almost made it too, save the last Sectumsempra that grazed her arm, causing blood to gush out of her arm. The death eater shouted in triumph, which only caused Ginny to laugh. "What are you laughing at blood traitor?" the woman snarled. "You'll bleed to death before you ever even find a healer."

Ginny shook her head amusingly as she passed her wand over the wound. It closed without a hitch before Ginny replied, "Don't look now, but you're sinking." By now the woman was waist high in sand as she looked down. The woman then completely ignored Ginny and tried to levitate herself out only to be stunned by the self-same woman. "See you in interrogation," Ginny chirped before firing the last portkey at the death eater squad leader. Once the woman disappeared she continued down the maze.

From that point on the maze was normal. She wound up facing a Dementor, a Boggart, a Hippogriff, and at least three magical traps before she made her way into the centre, checking it as she went. Not trusting anything at this point, she cast a detection charm on her ticket, which briefly glowed blue. She heard a disappointed sigh from behind her, causing her to turn around with wand pointed in the direction of the words. There stood Luna, looking a little injured but nothing worth any concern. "It figures," Luna said with a sad head shake. "The old man just won't give up, will he?"

"Apparently not," Ginny agreed as Harry and Neville came out from their entry points, "Don't touch the tickets, they're portkeys." Both

men nodded and approached their girlfriends as Hermione and Ron both entered the clearing.

“Haleigh, could you take the portkey charms off of the tickets without letting the old man know they’ve been broken?” Hermione thought about it for a moment and then nodded, conjuring six glass balls. She then cast a couple of charms on the balls and floated them over to the tickets, touching one ball per ticket. As each ball started go glow blue it was then banished toward an empty portion of the hedge wall. As the last ball was launched Harry reached up and took his ticket. A soft bell chimed, indicating he was done within the time limit. The other five quickly grabbed their own tickets, and as Hermione grabbed hers the hedges fell, revealing the last obstacles. The monsters disappeared before they could do anything but react in surprise, and the glass balls fell to the pitch.

“Don’t touch the glass balls, their portkeys!” Harry announced as the group of examiners started their approach.

“And stay away from the sand, it’s quicksand,” Ginny followed, which earned a raised eyebrow from Harry and Neville.

“What portkeys?” Madam Marchbanks asked. She then spotted the dead bodies on the field as well and demanded, “And just what happened here?”

Harry then went into a rather lengthily explanation about the death eaters that ambushed him, and his use of Ministry provided portkeys for the survivors. This was quickly confirmed by the others with their experiences. Ginny was saddened to learn every one of wound up killing at least one assailant. Then Harry admitted that they were nervous enough after the attacks that they scanned their objectives for further traps and noticed a contact portkey on each. Griselda was frowning deeply when it was all over and shook her head. “I’d say under the circumstances you passed. All of you. The Aurors have been summoned, and after you’re done talking to them I suggest you go back to your dorms. Don’t worry about the headmaster and other professors. I’ll talk to them. You’ll get your complete scores tomorrow, so off you get.” Once she shooed them away, she turned to her

colleagues and conversed with them briefly before she headed on to confront Dumbledore. The headmaster's reputation would definitely be taking a hit off of this.

A/N:

The following is a listing of Characters and their alternate names and descriptions:

Harry — Halstead — a rounder face, very light brown hair (longer than Neville's) and brown eyes.

Hermione — Haleigh — red-headed look with green eyes and a more angular face

Luna -- Lilith — Ovular face with hazel eyes and strawberry blond hair

Ron — Ryan — Squarish face with light brown hair with blue eyes

Neville — Nathan — Thin triangular face with dark brown/black hair and brown eyes

Ginny — Gwenyth (Unspeakable name: Selene) — Combination round and square face with light brown hair and blue eyes

Chapter 12: Life and Death

Department of Mysteries Team Room: Gamma

Ministry for Magic

London, England

October 30, 1981

Harry's POV

If other things weren't weighing on his mind, Harry would be reflecting on how most people were going home for the weekend. Instead, he and his group were in their team room reviewing everything that had happened since their N.E.W.T.'s for their big event tomorrow. A lot had happened to get them from Hogwarts to here, both to them and around them, but most of it was behind the scenes as far as history was concerned, so they had judged their impact in this time as minimal, but positive. That was a good thing as far as the group was concerned.

Presently Ron was standing up and delivering a report on the current movements of the Dark Lord and the Dark Puppet. The Dark Lord, aka Albus Dumbledore, appeared to be gaining ground, at least as far as the surface of both politics and the war was concerned. While the public believed that it was only a matter of time that the Dark Puppet, aka Voldemort, before would win, nothing could be further from the truth. Both the Longbottoms and the Potters were currently under the Fidelius Charm with Moody and Pettigrew (respectively) their secret keepers. Dumbledore was convinced, so far as they could tell, that all was going according to plan, but the reality of the situation couldn't be further from the truth.

A great many people, most of whom operated behind the scenes, had started to take a closer look at the Headmaster's activities after the teams Defense Mastery trials. While the populace and the test administrators (save Madam Marchbanks) accepted Dumbledore's story about the Death Eaters having come through the forbidden forest without him knowing, some questioned how that could be

possible. Conspiracy theories started to run rampant in the back rooms of the most seedy dives with the most prevalent story being that Dumbledore himself imperiused a higher ranking Death eater to send so many teams and turned a blind eye to it all. After all, 36 death eaters were captured as a result of the attack, with no really obvious reason as to why. The ticket portkeys never seemed to make the rumor mill for some reason, though Harry thought the old man obfuscated some people to keep it that way.

The attack galvanized Jason into making some executive decisions where the Unspeakables were concerned because of that debacle. He had detailed two teams of four each to start surveillance on Dumbledore while he “loaned out Team Gamma to the yanks.” In reality, the team had been shipped over to New Orleans so they could learn technomancy, “Light” magic and spirit magics; things that weren’t taught in the Magical Commonwealth by anybody.

Yes, while they could have imported trainers into Britain, there was always the chance that Dumbledore or even Riddle could learn of what they were learning. Plus it gave “Halstead Penwell” and crew the chance to drop off the face of the earth by having him literally disappear en route. This it was felt ended any interest that Dumbledore would have of them, and give them some breathing room. In the mean time, they worked from the surveillance team’s information to weaken Dumbledore’s international support while attending both magical and non-magical universities.

In the meantime Dumbledore had drawn in the Marauders as auxiliary members of the Order of the Phoenix. That maneuvered James, who Dumbledore had suspicions of being the last Gryffindor Heir, into Dumbledore’s control. Thus when Trelawney made her first prophecy Dumbledore he was in position to set up the final fall of the Gryffindor line (at least as far as he knew). The Unspeakable plant in the Order had notified Jason when higher security for the two families were announced. Jason re-called team Gamma, instructing them to drop their outside personas at the airport, for they would not be returning to public life. Instead they would be assigned to lead the surveillance teams’ work directly in their capacity as over-all mission leader against the Dark Lord and his Puppet.

Unfortunately the old man's manipulations required that he hold most of his secrets close to his chest, so the information the surveillance teams were gathering had slowed down to a trickle. Harry had toyed with the idea of having someone infiltrate the Order for them, but ultimately decided against it. Dumbledore was too good of a legilimens for someone to be able to fool him for too long. Even so, Team Gamma had their own personal history to fall back on here, so they knew the major events. Though one thing had become clear to the team shortly thereafter, Dumbledore's inner circle were starting to eye the Marauders for recruitment. Specifically Black and Lupin.

Black would turn down the chance and have his memories of the event obliterated, though an undetectable listening charm of Hermione's design recorded the attempt. Harry had agonized over whether or not to tell Sirius of the attempt, finally deciding that he would do so in a time-delayed message to be delivered in Harry's fifth year just after the Christmas hols. That way the time line would be preserved as much as it could be, while at the same time giving his godfather a chance to make his own decisions about the last days of his life.

As it was harder to get to Lupin than it was Sirius (the werewolf didn't go out nearly as much) they didn't know what became of Dumbledore's offer to him. They had initially thought of just approaching him directly, since the werewolf got along with the Ravenshire Six very well, but that idea was scrapped due to the risks of discovery. Thus they had no idea what had happened to Remus, which did not sit well with them all. Personally, Harry was rather up in the air about whose side the last marauder was on. After all, the man hadn't really tried to help Harry when he was growing up.

Ron's report closed with the reminder that tonight's mission would give them more information on what Dumbledore would be up to, though it would not be nearly as good as having a charm on an inner-circle member. Still, James and Lily were both order members and thus would at least have some useful information, which they could finally, after all these years, finally learn. The group knew of course that the Potters were still under the employ of the Department of Mysteries, as Croaker had refused their resignation due to their having to actually go into hiding. Instead they were moved to the non-

public side and set to confidential research projects. This included, amongst other things, research into the Veil of Death.

Harry found their faces quite humorous when they were told their resignations had been refused. Instead of letting the couple go they were taken to a training room where Harry and Hermione stood waiting. The Potters were introduced as Raptor and Firebrand, which confirmed in the minds of the entire team that Lily and James were the Children of Time. This was further born out by Lily's private research project of time dilation. Thus, after introductions, the Potters' training in light magic began.

Hermione had become quite adept in both spell creation and technomancy over the years, though Lily had her beat on the technomancy side. Still, Hermione's research into "light" magic (which she had found a precious few resources for in the states) meant that she had quite a bit to teach the pregnant woman. The pace was grueling but short, lasting for only three days. There simply weren't that many "light" spells left after the purges from the past generations of Dumbledores in the world. Hermione of course had been creating more spells, which she then taught to Team Gamma and to the Potters. Thus the couple were nearly ready for what Team Gamma knew was coming.

Neville asked about the other Dumbledore family members, and what would be done with them. To be honest, most of the team was up in the air as to what to do with Aberforth, the headmaster's sole remaining relative. The others had passed away a long time ago, and neither Dumbledore had ever thought to perpetuate the line. Leading consensus however was deliberating between trial and prison and the Line Termination ritual. Both would eliminate the problem, but both were also equally repulsive. Azkaban would be a death sentence for any of the remaining Dumbledores, while the line termination ritual was little better than psychological and physical torture, as it made everyone forget the targeted family. Whoever held the last name of Dumbledore would cease to exist as far as the public was concerned. Even their money would be cut off, since that relied on a public identity. Thus it would not be long until the family starved to death.

The decision would not be made tonight, though they all knew it had to be made soon, else they would make even more enemies during the opening salvo's of the war. In the meantime, they were ready to move on to Hermione's report, which naturally forked from their discussion: spell research. In addition to learning as much as she could from books about "light" magic, she had begun an in-depth study of life and death, augmented by Firebrand's research into the Veil of Death. Most people had thought this a waste of time at best, given the number of people who had gotten absolutely nowhere in the past, but Hermione quickly pointed out to their higher ups that she was after one thing in particular: the ability to stop the Avada Kedavra curse with a shield of some kind. Besides physical shields though, she had a very hard time doing so until Firebrand actually came up with something: the AK spell was based on hate.

Hate powered all three unforgivable curses. So much so that to cast one of them you had to have an over-whelming desire to actively dominate a person in that area. The imperius curse required you to hate someone so much that you wanted to control a person completely while the cruciatus curse made you want to actively torture them. That is why Harry could not cast that curse on Bellatrix. Righteous anger does not allow for true hatred, nor does it allow for prolonged torture. Thus his crucio failed against Bellatrix. And since Harry couldn't even muster the kind of hate needed against either Voldemort or Albus, he would be forever barred from those three curses. But at the same time, his capacity for love was immense, and love could easily be used to counter hate. Thus, with Firebrand's help (at least initially), Hermione started to craft a shield charm based upon love.

It was not easy going however, as love was rather hard to break down to a good definition of love in English, never mind arithmatically. But after several months of long and exhaustive research, she was finally able to put together a working model, one that worked for everyone. She had Harry try it first against the imperius curse, as he was naturally resistant to that particular spell, and after the first three times he had been able to tweak the spell into working. Then they had moved on to several other dark spells, to find each one that relied on darker emotions failed against the shield. Those that were more gray treated the shield as a double-strength protego curse,

while other “light” spells only needed half the strength to penetrate. Fortunately, it was found that another shield could be layered on top of it, but not underneath of it. Thus the entire team had over the past few days spent time learning this shield, for their own protection.

Still, they were faced with the problem that the protection afforded by this shield was obvious, at least as much as a normal shield. Cruciatus attempted on this shield could not penetrate and only provided a light show as the beam splashed against it. No one was willing to try the AK against it, but Hermione was confident it would work. Harry could tell that Luna had another view though, one she was loath to bring up. Taking a deep breath, he mentally nudged her to go ahead and voice it, since Hermione would never forgive herself if she over-looked something. Finally Luna shook all over once and said, “I think it will only be partially effective against the killing curse.”

Hermione was shocked at this, as she was hoping this would be the team’s answer to saving the Potters. “But why?” she asked, just a tad upset. “If any of the unforgivables is based upon hatred, it would be the AK. This shield should easily neutralize that hate, which doesn’t leave anything else for it to do.”

Luna shook her head and looked her female lover in the eyes and asked, “How does the killing curse kill?”

Hermione of course had dissected the curse numerous times, but found no one could answer it completely since there were two unknown parts. The first Hermione attributed to hate, but the second she couldn’t peg. “No one knows Luna,” she said quietly. “Arithmancy breaks down at a point there.”

Luna nodded and sighed, gifting her lover a sad smile, “Hermione, I love you with all my heart, just as I love Harry. But if you have one failing, it’s that you sometimes miss the most obvious clues from looking at the details instead of the over-all picture. Broad spectrum here love, what does each unforgivable effect, specifically?”

Hermione bit her bottom lip as she thought things through rather intently while Harry had to keep from reaching over to show her just how much that action attracted him. He held back though, knowing

that she had to think this through now. "Okay, the imperius curse effects a person's mind, completely dominating it and controlling thoughts, thereby controlling the body. The cruciatus curse controls the body directly, causing all the nerve endings on the body to fire at once, thus turning around and eventually effecting the mind. But the AK is different, in that it doesn't attack either body or mind..."

Seeing Hermione was stuck, Luna was about to ask another question when Ginny piped up, "Hermione, what part of a person's over-all fitness have you overlooked in that statement?"

Hermione blinked and automatically answered the question with, "The Soul." 'Mind, Body, and Soul' had been the cornerstone of their training over the past six years, each one of them needed help in at least two areas, since they felt that no one part could be neglected if they wanted to win. Thus each of them had eventually saw a mind healer if for no other reason than to help cope with the deaths they would have to witness and cause over the next war. Hermione for example need the most help in the "heart and soul" areas, so that took an equal footing to her physical conditioning. Just as that popped into Harry's mind, the implication apparently hit Hermione, for she paled a bit. "The avada kedavra forcibly removes a person's soul... Oh my god!"

Luna nodded at that and said, "Your shield would counter the hate, but at the same time it would not counter the soul magic portion any more than any other type of shield spell would, since there's no soul component to the shield. I'm not sure exactly what would happen, but the person behind the shield would not be completely unaffected."

Hermione jerked around to face Harry, tears in her eyes, "I'm sorry Harry. I thought I really had the problem solved." Harry simply stood up and hugged his oldest female friend and whispered, "That's okay love. None of us are perfect. We'll work with what we have, and maybe mum will have something to add that can help. Otherwise... well, one of the prophecies said we'd have to face death, right? We'll work it out."

Hermione buried her head into Harry's chest and cried for a little while. To her mind she failed her mate, and it was too late to do

anything about it, other than hope. This of course went against what Hermione was as far as spell creation went, which left her feeling slightly lost. But at the same time Luna was the go-to person in the faith department, and as she hugged the both of them Harry heard her say, "He's right. I don't see Harry giving up now. Just remember that and have faith in him." This finally settled Hermione down, as Hermione's faith in Harry was pretty much unshakable.

After a few minutes more they were just about ready to move on to the next topic when they heard a knock on their door. Neville, the only one with his hood up, got up to answer the door while everyone else put their hoods in place. After a brief discussion at the door Jason, Croaker, and the rest of the unspeakables that knew more about more than their existence (all five of them) entered the team room. The door was closed, sealed, and soundproofed as Jason began to speak.

"As you know tonight and tomorrow night begins your biggest mission yet, the saving of our world. As of now I'm coding this as a code 8 mission, with prerogative going to Charlemagne to increase or decrease the code level as he sees fit. This mission has several sub-missions that are broken down by Charlemagne himself, the first of which is saving the Potter adults from their fate. Do you have everything prepared?"

Harry stood up and brought out a large box that had been under his chair. "For the most part. There are a couple of factors that can only be accounted for on site, but we have everything else under control and ready. This box contains all the proof we have of the true Dark Family's actions over the generations, as well as evidence of the remaining Founder Heirs. We have all the forms and reports, both raw and final, of both surveillance teams, and their members have been obliviated. We have, however, one piece of information that you must have, as it is more germane to the Dark Puppet than the Dark Lord, and our history shows this was found out in your time, not ours."

Jason nodded and took the folder Harry had, passing another folder to Harry in return. "The Potters have filed a duty version of their will with us, which I have now handed all copies of to you. If you are right, the Dark Lord will tie up all other copies, so it is imperative that you

keep them on you. Also included in that file are the complete, original personnel files on each of you. When you leave our time there will be no documentation of your existence left. Finally I am ordering you to obliviate us all of our memories of you personally and replace them with a much milder form under different names of six senior Unspeakables that died in the line of duty. Use your more intrusive spells, that way you can avoid the same problem you had with Dumbledore's obliviation."

Harry grimaced at that memory, shaking his head. One of the main reasons he had to kill off the "Halstead Penwell" persona was that Dumbledore would not leave him alone. The old man never did recover his complete memory of that fight before their seventh year, but enough leaked through to convince the manipulative old bastard that controlling Penwell would allow him to break whatever was put in place. Thus one of Hermione's more immediate projects while they were in the U.S. was the development of a spell much like obliviate but would effect an occluded mind the same as the standard spell effected a non-occluded one. Never-the-less to say, it didn't take her long, given the motivation they had to make sure it was done. "That would be for the best. Yes sir."

Jason nodded and looked around the room. "It has been a pleasure to work with each one of you. I can only hope and pray you are successful on your missions, for I need not tell you what's at stake. Do you all have all your personal and professional effects right here with you now?" As he watched every member of Team Gamma nod their heads he sighed and nodded back. "This room has been spelled that as the last of you leaves it all traces of your residence here will be gone, so that when we awaken from our obliviation it will appear as we had reset the room for general use. You have everything you need, so all I can do is order you to deploy and wish you luck. Merlin watch over you and fair winds."

That was the team's cue, as Harry pulled his wand and called out, "Oblivio totalus!" A white flash appeared in the room, and when the light faded only Team Gamma was not effected. While Charlie set the instruction the rest of his team left, each taking one last look at the room that was theirs for the past six years. Harry sighed and paused

at the door to his team's room, giving it one last look as he stepped out to confront his future.

Godric's Hollow

Wales

6:00 PM October 31, 1981

Harry's POV

"I still don't know why you had to stun him," Hermione questioned again as they approached the Potter cottage at Godric's Hollow. "Surely if we took a bit more time..."

"Phoebe," Charlemagne cautioned as they approached the end of the drive, "He wouldn't have taken no for an answer, and as much as I would like to save him from his fate, if he came here he'd die now. Not to mention it took us entirely too long to find him in the first place. Don't worry, the enervate talisman will wake him up in enough time for him to come, once its all done."

Even Hermione had to agree to that. They had run out of time. It was less than an hour before sunset, and the Dark Puppet would be showing up shortly thereafter. Pettigrew was already gone, and if it weren't for the note that Sirius had in the rat's handwriting, they would never have been able to find the place. Still, it took precious time to convince the man that they weren't trying to kill James, including having to drop identities. Harry only hoped the fast obliviate job that he did once Sirius was unconscious would take care of things, otherwise there would be some considerable problems in the future. This meant they didn't have time to really clue the Potters in on what was happening enough to gain their help in the preparations, so Harry had to hope that his parents would understand, though he somewhat doubted it.

'Why do you doubt they would understand Harry?' Luna's voice asked through their bond as they concentrated on the address left on the note. Once the cottage came into view, the team moved forward

quickly, with Neville and Ron in the back masking their presence and setting up charms to keep the innocent away. Harry shook his head in amusement. James and Lily, or Raptor and Firebrand, were rather obstinate as far as Unspeakables went. They usually demanded answers to questions that were better left unasked before they'd take someone's word for something. 'Something you tried to encourage in them, if I remember right,' Luna reminded them. Harry really did chuckle there, as Luna had him dead to rights. Still, this was one time when explanations would have to be minimal and vague. Speaking of which, they had finally reached the front door.

The front door swung open when Harry knocked on it to reveal a wand pointed directly between Harry's eyes. "Password," he heard Jame's voice nearly hiss.

Harry had to smile at the level of caution they were showing as he answered, "You Potter, me Gryffindor." But instead of the wand dropping it came closer to his hooded face, now causing the young visitor to take a step back.

"Wrong answer, that man is dead," James replied coldly. "Who are you really?"

"The rumors of my demise were rather prematurely but purposefully exaggerated," Harry replied as he reached for his hood. "Jason, Croaker and Gnome send their greetings and regrets that they cannot be here in person, but they have lost their memories of our existence. However Mr. Hunter would like to remind Mr. Prongs that Mr. Prongs is in Mrs. Redtooth's way should she have to provide backup."

James' wand finally swung down to hang loosely in the limp hand of James. "We... You mean to tell me we were talking and being trained by you this entire time?" James asked, rather flabbergasted.

"James? Who is that, and how do they know my Marauder name?" Lily asked, sounding rather confused herself.

"Can we please enter Mr. Potter? We really don't have much time, and there's quite a bit to go over." Harry let a slight tone of hurry

creep into his voice, snapping the home owner out of his funk. After they were let in, Harry chose to take pity on his father and say, "You're not the only secret Marauder, Lily. Rather, we six make up the Neo-Marauders, since we're not truly qualified to be the first generation Marauders."

"I don't understand," Lily said as baby Harry started to scream. "Excuse me, he's been doing that all day, and most of the time there's nothing wrong," Lily commented as she ran back up the stairs. A few moments later found everyone seated, including baby Harry, who had put up a fit until he was seated by older Harry and Lily. "So can someone tell me what's going on?"

James just shrugged and gave older Harry an 'after you' gesture. Slowly Harry reached up and took off his hood. He had not renewed his disguise spell, so he was back in his original form. "You originally knew me as Halstead Penwell," he started to explain as he temporarily cast a glamor on himself. "But that was not the name I was born with. You see, around 22 years ago, my personal time, I was born and introduced to the world as Harry James Potter." Lily's mouth dropped to the floor as Harry gave his mother a rueful smile, "Yes, that makes you my mother and this little tyke me. Thankfully he's too young to remember seeing me. And no, I'm not crazy or lying, instead I'm a time traveler, from almost fifteen years in the future, as are my friends and team mates. And the reason I'm here from the future is because of three prophecies."

James blinks and looks at older Harry, the surprise evident on the Potter Patriarch's face. "I thought you couldn't tell us why you were here! At least that's what you told me!"

Lily's head snapped toward James as he exclaimed this, "You mean you knew and you didn't tell me?!"

"Lily," Neville spoke up, "First of all, Hi, I'm Neville Longbottom. Second, James couldn't tell you, as he was sworn to secrecy by the prior Potter Lord. Please don't be too hard on him." Lily looked like she wanted to argue with that, but eventually caved in. Neville took a deep sigh of relief and let Harry continue on.

“I’m sorry mum, but you’ll learn why soon enough. Besides, the time travel thing should give you at least one idea why I couldn’t tell you.” At Lily’s nod he turned toward James and said, “I know I said that. But we all are going to be leaving here soon enough, and we need to give you a warning and ask something of you that’s going to be very hard for you to do. But first, I need to explain the first prophecy, which you may or may not have heard from Dumbledore.” With that he relayed the first prophecy that related to him, the one given by Sybill Trelawney

It became evident that while they knew there was a prophecy, and that was the reason that Voldemort was after them, they did not know its contents. “In short,” James said after a few minutes of rather tense cursing on all sides, “We knew that Voldemort thought that one of the kids would be his downfall, but not anything else. Is that truly all it says?”

“IS THAT ALL!” Lily all but roared hysterically. “James Charles Potter! Do you realize what that means for our son!” As she looked toward little Harry she realized that the older Harry was also her son, and she sat back near shock. “But that means...”

Harry shook his head from side to side half in exasperation and half in sadness. “Mum, you don’t know how much I really hate to say this, but we truly don’t have time for all the implications of this. Before you get upset, let me say that our time is short because in little less than two hours my history is going to come full circle. You have been betrayed, and there’s nothing we can do to stop it. James... Dad...”

“We’ve been betrayed?” James interrupted. “You mean Peter betrayed us? Lily, pack your bags, we’ve got to run, now.”

Harry stood up and put himself between his parents and the stairs, “Wait! Please! I know that would be the most logical thing to do, but let me explain to you what will happen if you do run.”

“Actually, let me,” Luna said, stepping forward. “Mrs. Potter, I’m Luna Lovegood-Gryffindor, your son’s wife, and I’m a Seeress.”

James just fell back into the chair behind him now completely flabbergasted. "James knows when I formally became Lady Gryffindor, he was present at my vows. I'm actually a second wife to Harry though, the first being Hermione here," she said with a loving smile toward Hermione. "I tell you this because I want you to know the stakes I have in this entire affair. You have to know I don't want anything bad for Harry. I would rather die myself than allow him to be hurt, even for a moment. It tears me up to know what has happened to him, to us. But as much as I want to save him from pain and grief, I want him alive to father my children. And if you leave now he won't be. None of us will be, for we'll all be in paradox and our world will be destroyed."

Tears rolled down Lily's face as a look of desperation shown clearly on Lily's face. "Surely there must be another way. Surely we can keep our son safe from that monster."

"If you leave now you'll keep him safe for another week, then he'll die, before Voldemort kills you. Your protections will fail because of a lack of sacrifice, and all that you have worked for will be lost. Your son will die and Voldemort himself will soon follow."

"Wait... by what you just told us Harry's the only one that can kill him? How will Voldemort die if he kills..." She couldn't finish the sentence as the doom of her son crossed her face.

"Because Voldemort is not the Dark Lord," James said in awed revelation. "Dumbledore is. It all makes sense now. I know you told Sirius and me when Dad was still alive, but it all makes sense. All the other lines are either gone or unknowledgeable. Hufflepuff's line doesn't know who they are, Ravenclaw's line is dead. Slytherin's line will die with Voldemort, and Gryffindor's line would perish in paradox..."

Harry nodded slowly as he stood up again. "I am your soon, and declared Lord Gryffindor by the last Gryffindor. Our original mission in the past was two fold: to train to be able to face the Dark Lord in our own time, and to find the Children of Time."

“What are the Children of time?”

“People from the past, that the world thinks dead, that appear in their future, our present, to fight along side the Child of Fate and the new Founders. I’m the Child of Fate, the leader in the fight against the darkness,” Harry answered his father, “These five, with me, are the new Founders, and you two are the Children of Time. Your research in time magics will play a pivotal role in the battles yet to come,” he said, looking at his father, “And mum’s research into death will allow us to cheat death, as it were. Not by hiding, as our ancestor Ignatus Peverell did, but by breaking a long-held belief that the killing curse cannot be shielded against. I know your researching is incomplete, on both your parts, and we have something for a baseline for your research. It’s incomplete, as we just discovered, but with everything else it should work. But for all this to work, everything must seem to play out like it did before.”

“How did it play out before?” James asked, though by the sound of his voice he was sure he would not like the answer.

“Voldemort will show up in an hour and a half. You were, or at least must seem to be, surprised by his attack. Dad, you send mum upstairs to take me and run. Mum, you go upstairs and complete your ritual of protection. I guess they must have put anti-app and anti-portkey wards up before the attack. If Voldemort uses parseltongue to do it, you won’t detect them going up. Voldemort fights James first, and Dad dies, or at least will seem to. Mum is upstairs and begs Voldemort to take her instead, and refuses to move out of the way when Voldemort offers to let her live. So he kills her, or seems to, and then tries to kill me. But mum’s protections save me, rebounding the curse onto Voldemort and destroying his body. He won’t die, we don’t know why, but he will leave. Hagrid comes to pick me up, and Sirius goes after Pettigrew,” Harry explains, his contempt of the rat animagus showing clearly.

“That’s why you never liked him,” James said sadly. “You knew he would betray us, but by what you said...”

“If I outed him while we were in Hogwarts, you and Lily would never have hooked up. His actions indirectly affected others, and kept Snape’s part of your war going long enough for your bully incident,” Harry explained. “Afterward, you would never have believed me.” James just nodded his agreement there, he wouldn’t have. “By the time I could safely tell you, we were “dead” in America undergoing training and schooling of our own. And now, it’s too late.”

“What was your life like growing up?” Lily asked, looking directly into her son’s eyes. The ghosts of the memories of hell on earth that shown in the older Harry’s eyes were answer enough. “No. I won’t let you go through that. There has to be another way. We know what’s going to happen. We can do something, even if it’s a medical portkey to take Harry directly to Sirius, or Alice...”

‘If they send him directly to Sirius, it won’t disrupt the time stream enough to cause a paradox Harry. You’ll at least know love enough until you start school. But your life during Hogwarts years will be as bad, if not worse. Sirius will die when he did, but he and us five will be the only port you will have during that time.’ Luna advised as she looked at him. “It would have to be Sirius, not Alice. Sending him to Alice would destroy us all.”

“They won’t make it much past Voldemort’s fall,” Neville adds quietly to answer what they all knew to be Lily’s next question.

‘Harry, it’s up to you, but please consider it carefully,’ he heard Hermione advise in his head. He thought about it while James and Lily tried to refine the idea. Finally he said, “I’ll make the portkey using parselmagic. That way not even Voldemort’s wards can hold him/me here,” Harry said. The parents looked at Harry in surprise, considering he had been absolutely against any change in plans so far. “But in return I need you two to learn how to cast that spell, and allow us to cast glamors on you. It’s as close as we can get to making this shield’s work unnoticeable.”

“Won’t Voldemort know the killing curse has failed when we don’t fall down dead?” Lily asks. “And what about my sacrifice? Won’t your spell cancel that?”

“The answer to the first question would be no,” Hermione said, “I’m the creator of the shield we will be teaching you. Unfortunately we just discovered that it’s not complete, and I don’t know enough to complete it,” she said, obviously chagrined. “I’m a master of Arithmancy, Runes, and Spellcrafting, but there’s a second variable in the killing curse that I can’t decipher. The one for hate I finally did, but we figured out just yesterday that our shield does not take into full account the spell’s effects. And I don’t know anything about Necromancy, and what little voodoo I’ve learned doesn’t seem to translate well.”

“Let me guess, you figured out that the AK removes a person’s soul from their body, forcing an automatic shutdown, unlike the Dementor’s attack which leaves the body’s functions intact, right?” At Hermione’s nod he shakes his head before he continues, “Necromancy won’t help you. I know enough of it to know that while it works with the dead, its limit is the soul itself. Even the darkest of necromancy spells has very little to do with manipulating souls. The dead you work with when you come back is powered by magic and the abyss, not a soul. Despite most people’s beliefs on the subject, necromantic spells on a body deals with the body’s physical or magical energy, not the soul. Fairy magic is actually closer, but not quite.”

Hermione just boggled for a moment at James’ explanation before continuing, “Well the Light Magic we’re working on seems to have some work in that direction. I’m surprised about the necromancy though.”

“You’re recreating Light Magic?” James asked agog, “That’s been all but destroyed, thanks to era of Darkness. I’m impressed. Perhaps you should ask someone to look into Holy Magic?”

“We are,” Ginny piped up. “Or rather, that’s my area of expertise, and how we will answer Lily’s second question.” When the Potters turned to look at her, she gave Hermione a smile as she brought everyone back on track, “Let me guess, you’re using the Holy Blood Magic ritual “Protection of Love and Endowment,” right?” When Lily

nods her head toward Ginny she said, "I actually have another ritual that can use all the pre-work you've done so far to make an even stronger protection over Harry than that one. And you don't have to sacrifice your life. Don't get me wrong, you will have to make a sacrifice, but what that sacrifice will be is decided by the powers that be, whatever your religious beliefs consider Them to be."

"What does that mean exactly?" Lily asked, sounding a bit leery of that statement.

"Holy Magic is about two things: Love and Faith. The Faith part doesn't really differentiate between what you believe religiously, whether it be Merlin or Jehovah or the Lady or the Green Man, or whatever. So long as you believe in something, and your soul is Light, you can use it. The Ritual of Love's Sacrifice is much like the Christian Muggles belief and tradition of "putting the burden onto the Lord," so to speak. Or put another way, "offering a fleece unto the Lord." Basically the ritual hands the fate of the person you're casting it on directly into the Ultimate Power's hands. If the person you're sacrificing for deserves to live, have whatever, or be whatever, they shall. If not, then the protection fails. Given the Prophecies though, and how obviously good Harry is, there's no conceivable way for it to fail. In this example, you're asking for the Ultimate Power's protection for young Harry against the killing curse in general and Voldemort in specific. You plead your case to the Power, and then offer whatever the Power wants as payment. Only once in recorded history has that payment been the life of anyone involved, and then it was asking for redemption for someone who was as evil as Voldemort. I found it, believe it or not, in the library of an asian friend of mine. So it will even work with Shinto and Buddhism."

Lily seemed silent for a few moments before nodding. "Okay, so if we use that and I use your shield, can we stick around long enough after we're revived to ensure Harry is in good hands before we go?"

Team Gamma all turned their head to Harry, who finally nodded. "Yes, we can do that. But if you decide to do that route we have to get started. We have an hour to perform the ritual and to teach you this

shield. And that's not very long at all." Lily finally nodded as they began their preparations for the events to come.

It took exactly 50 minutes to get everything done, and Harry was sweating every minute of it. Finally everything fell into place, and with five minutes to go Team Gamma faded out into the night so as to not change history any more than it already had been. Once they settled down, Harry spoke quietly into his com pin, "Ginny, was the ritual successful?"

"Yes, though we have no idea what the sacrifice is though. We just got a feeling that what has to be will be, and there's nothing we can do," Ginny's voice came back.

"Voldemort, Pettigrew, and ... Snape at 11 o'clock," Neville's voice interrupted. "Voldemort is casting something while Snape seems to be... oh sweet Merlin. Apparently you being a Potter allowed us to come in here without confronting the other wards here. Snape is keying Voldemort into them!"

Harry saw red at this, and wanted nothing more than to run out and just mow them all down. The desire for justice raged against his logical brain saying there was nothing he could do, but the need for justice won out rather quickly. But just as he was starting to move he found he couldn't. Something was holding his body and magic still as he struggled to move. 'What is must be, Child of Fate. You cannot interfere more.' Harry knew this wasn't Fate's voice, for it was male and very much more powerful. 'Their paths will cross yours soon enough, my grandchild. Just hold yourself for now.' It was with this voice, a female voice, that he realized he was fighting his own magic, which was holding him in place.

But Harry was not one to give up. Dealing with Fate should have been that clue, "Can anyone else do anything to take Snivellus or Pettigrew out?"

'I can't move, Harry,' both girls answered back with similar responses from everyone else. Three figures came into Harry's view before they blew the door off the front of the floor. Not even a minute

later the ground floor of the house was alight in spell fire, with the sounds of three men laughing in sadistic glee echoing from within. Finally there was silence before a bright green flash went off inside. Still Harry could not move. A minute later he could hear his mother screaming from upstairs, pleading for his younger self's life. Then he heard a loud voice say something that made his blood run ice cold.

"Listen mudblood, for the sake of what you once thought we had. Either stand aside and let the Dark Lord do what he needs to do, or you will die. Either way, I shall enjoy your body at least once before tonight's out. Potter is dead, and you will pay the price for your betrayal of me with your body." It was Snape. Harry had his answer now, even if Dumbledore's repeated protestations of trust wasn't enough. Snape was beyond redemption. HOW DARE HE THREATEN TO RAPE HIS MOTHER'S CORPSE! Harry struggled even harder against his own magic, trying desperately to break free, but to no avail.

"Never! The only way you will kill my son is by killing me first!"

"So be it mudblood," Voldemort's voice echoed. Even though it was obvious the man was talking in a low voice, somehow it carried outside. "AVADA KEDAVRA!"

His mother screamed in fear, then was silence reigned. Precious minutes fell by before a great explosion blew out the walls of the nursery, sending out the bodies of still conscious Snape and Pettigrew. Harry had the grim satisfaction of their certain deaths yanked away as both of them disappeared before they ever even hit the ground.

The battleground was silent as a wraith like thing flew out of the remains heading toward the south east at a high rate of speed. As it disappeared into the night Harry felt his magic release him, only to find himself being whisked away through time and space before he could even take a step forward.

Unknown Place, Unknown Time

Realm of the Gods

Harry's POV

Harry woke up in what felt like a short time later, though he felt a little dizzy still. Even though the world was spinning he knew something was wrong, as it was light out when just a moment ago it was nighttime. He could hear the groans of his friends as they started moving. He however could not move, even though the world was slowly coming to a stop. Still, it was blurry enough he had to feel for his glasses, which he found still on his face. "Where are Mr. And Mrs. Potter, are they here?" he heard a male voice ask, probably Neville's.

"Yes, they're by me," He heard Ginny's voice answer in response. "They're alive, but unresponsive."

"Cwt U tenn un thrll sirgebe?" Harry said. He tried to ask if they'd survive, but his body simply wasn't wanting to cooperate with him. He couldn't even feel Hermione or Luna. And as soon as he realized that he started panicking and trying to scramble up, even though it came out more as a seizure to everyone else.

"Harry's hurt!" he heard Ginny call. "Check on Hermione and Luna!" Harry suddenly felt small hands holding him down, though there was a rather light wait on his body. His mind did not make the connection that it was Ginny though as he was frantic over his bond mates. Right then he heard two mumbling groans that sounded like his love's voices, but they did not sound good! This only renewed his determination, though his body still refused to behave normally. "Harry please! Calm down Harry. We've got you."

"Lib no ut!" he moaned loudly instead of screaming. What was happening to him? His body wouldn't react as it should, he couldn't talk, and he still couldn't feel his bond mates! He could hear them, but they sounded really bad off!

"HWRLY!" he heard Hermione's voice call, which was soon echoed by Luna. Then he heard someone cast an incarcerus spell, followed by stronger, larger hands holding him down.

“Go ahead Ginny, see if you can tell what’s wrong with everyone here,” he heard Ron’s voice answer. That had to be the person that was holding him down. Soon he felt magic coursing through his system, which seemed to burn like acid in his body. He started to thrash even more as Ron called out, “Ginny stop! The magic’s hurting him!”

“ But it’s just a simple diagnostic spell!” the female Weasley answered.

“It doesn’t matter, any magic on them will hurt them right now,” a thin whispery voice echoed throughout the area. Harry somehow felt that he knew that voice from somewhere, but where he could not say. This was punctuated by a female scream of pain that sounded like it came from Luna. “Might I suggest releasing her from that, it’s got to be painful.”

He then heard someone scrambling over someplace before Neville’s voice spoke up. “Who are you?”

“Why don’t you ask Harry?” the voice answered, followed by a low chuckle. “That’s right, you can’t. It’s too bad really, given that he and I know each other so well. I tell you what, you can call me Lord.”

“Luna please! Calm do...” Ginny’s voice stalled out, though it sounded like she was struggling with something. “You... how are YOU here?!”

“Poor girl, perhaps I can make things all better? Of course this blood traitor and I had such fun, I may want to keep you for a while.” It was then Harry recognized the voice, and his blood ran cold, then hot, boiling hot.

“GET AWAY FROM HER!” he could hear his own voice call out, even if he could not tell how he was doing it. It felt like he was wrapped in ropes of magic, and it was responding of its own will.

“Bloody HELL!” he heard Ron’s voice scream as the pressure was suddenly gone from his arms. He felt his body rise up off of the ground, and the area that was once bright as day was now tinged red. He still couldn’t see much of anything, except one figure that was as clearly visible to him in the sharpest focus he had ever had. His eyesight confirmed it was Voldemort’s shade. “Harry!” He heard Ron’s voice. “Bloody hell mate, put me down!” Harry’s head seemed to turn itself toward the voice to see a very fuzzy shape that looked like it could be Ron floating above him, TEN FEET above him. He dismissed the form as not important right then as his focus once again turned itself to his nemesis.

“You will not have her,” Harry’s voice all but hissed. Something seemed to hit the coalescing figure, sending him flying away from the blur that had to be Luna, and all the other blurs in the area. “You will have none of these. They are mine.”

“Harry, Harry, Harry, Harry,” he said in a voice that sounded both sinisiterly rueful and hugely disappointed. “Don’t you understand? She’s mine, you’re mine, everyone is mine. Eventually they all will come to me. You all tried a foolish thing to thwart me from taking what is mine. So I will take you all instead of just you and your... mates.” With a deft flick of his left arm, a green sword dripping with a thick, disgusting ooze formed in his hand. “And you are not my equal.” With this Tom seemed to vanish, only to appear on Harry’s right side already swinging his sword at head level.

Harry instinctively tried to duck this, which was somewhat successful. He wasn’t sure how he was fighting given that he felt like he had no control over his body, but suddenly a blast of yellow light hit the figure directly in the chest, which sent him flying away. He felt something like an arm, but a lot more flexible bat the bad man away rather hard. He willed another attack against his opponent, only to find the being disappeared.

Suddenly he felt pain as if an arm was cut off as he flew forward and turned around at the same time. Voldemort was covered in some kind of reddish goo, and what looked like a rather large tentacle flopping around on the ground between them. “Harry, Harry, Harry... You can’t

hurt me. You know that. For all your power, and yes you're a fairly powerful opponent, even I must admit that, you're still a mere mortal. I however has made roads into immortality that you can never match. Though I do admit that you're giving me a good workout." The dark lord disappeared again, and he felt the man both upward and behind him, already swinging. Harry knew more than felt that he would not be able to block this blow.

But the blow never landed. Instead he felt the presence behind him flung away as more of the world started to come into focus. Standing beside him was Hermione, now in perfect focus and covered in tentacles much like the one he saw flopping around on the ground. "Honestly Harry, did you think I'd let you fight without me?" Okay, now this was completely surreal, as not only was Hermione looking like she was firmly in the middle of a patch of devil's snare, but her mouth was not forming the words he was hearing.

"I wouldn't dream of it love," he said as they split apart to avoid another attack from the being. His body still seemed to be somewhat disconnected from his thoughts, but he started to notice it was now starting to follow his intent, at least part of the time. If it wasn't following the forms of his thoughts, it was at least working according to his ideas. But even with Hermione, the heir of the Gaunts proved to be a nearly impossible opponent. Spells and tentacles flew all over the place, with blood and parts raining on the people below.

Moldyshorts seemed to be having fun, which worried Harry. The being seemed to alternate between avoiding and absorbing spells and physical attacks from both Hermione and himself, all the while completely ignoring spells from below the three combatants. Harry had a hard time keeping up as it was, and he could see Hermione was having similar problems. The most irritating thing so far was it looked like the wraith was just toying with them, all the while taunting them with things, like, "Is this really the best you can do? I thought you were so much better than this!"

Harry was about to really lose his temper when an orange spell appeared from above and behind Hermione to knock the would-be immortal back down onto the ground. Harry spared a look in the direction the spell had come from to see Luna hovering there in

angelic white wings with similar tentacles. "YOU WILL NOT HAVE THEM!" Luna screamed at Riddle. Suddenly Harry felt more in control of his body as the tentacles started to become more translucent tendrils. He could also feel, at least in a rudimentary sense, the feelings and thoughts from Hermione and Luna. Together the three turned back toward their antagonist as he started to stalk toward the Potters.

The trio didn't bother with a scream of challenge, but suddenly they found themselves between Voldemort and his prey. "You shall not pass," they all hissed in unison. They were answered by the flashing movement of their opponent's sword again, sending a beam of energy flying toward his prey. But it did not get anywhere as it hit a bluish white shield that sprung up out of seemingly then took a step back, his mockingly jovial demeanor now gone.

"The killing curse is my calling card, boy. You'll not stop me from my rightful prey." Another ten blades flew toward the Potters from all directions, only to be fully absorbed by the shield. Apparently Tom was not used to being thwarted like this, and did not like it. Instead he turned attention toward Harry and his wives and said, "So be it. First I'll finish you, then the rest of them. You'll go to the next world knowing that you could not save them."

To Harry, no more words needed to be said. Quickly the triumvirate attacked as one, attempting to surround the intruding deity. Spells, tentacles, and even swords seemed to fly in all directions as the battle waged on. Neville, Ginny, and Ron quickly threw up their strongest shields up and proceeded to mitigate collateral damage. The shade moved even faster, but now that the three of them were fighting they could both see and keep up with him. Voldemorts's face was unreadable as he fought without mercy and without hesitation. But the three had trained long and hard in pitched battles, both together and separate, and they weren't going down without a fight.

Finally Tom decided to flash away and make a dive for the group below. But Luna has expected this and the three appeared just before him and just shy of the shield. A simultaneous attack from the three of them scored, each throwing the tentacles to immobilize their opponent. Harry noticed, upon contact, that he could once again feel

the bonds between him and both of his beloved. In fact, it was stronger than it had ever been. And for some reason their opponent could not move.

“You may have me stalled Harry. But that’s all you’ve got. You and your two lovelies need all your concentration and power just to hold me. What makes you think you can stop me?” Riddle's asked in a mocking teacher-like voice.

“We only have to hold you until they wake, Tom,” Harry responded, though he felt tired. He noticed that the tentacles weren’t doing what anyone who had seen such things would think of, for which Harry was very thankful for. Instead they seemed to be merging with each-other as more and more tentacles whipped in from all three sides. “And don’t look now, but your prison is getting stronger.”

“Ah yes, the triumvirate bond is re-asserting itself. My my, that will be a problem, won’t it?” the snake man asked sarcastically. Suddenly his sword moved away from his hands completely and tried to attack the mass holding him in. But much to the being's obvious lament, the sword wasn’t doing anything to the bonds. “What the... HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE! No mortal bond can stop me!”

“The bond we share is not mortal, Tom,” Luna pronounced in a very clear and focused voice. “The Triumvirate bond is a bond forged by the Lord and Lady, and none may tear it asunder.”

“Providing each of you accept it,” the bound man replied with a devious smile on his face. Harry was startled when the world faded away and he was back at the Dursleys. “You Freak! You think that you deserve love? You’re nothing but a freak and therefore only deserve pain. You’ll never please a woman. Not even a whore! You won’t even make it as a poof!” Harry started to curl up into a ball as the feelings of belonging and happiness started to fade away.

The Dursley’s attacks got more brutal emotionally, expounding on many thoughts that he thought he had long since conquered. Emotional pain was then compounded with physical pain as the memories of all his beatings came back with a vengeance. His body

jerked as remembered blows landed, his bones feeling like they were broken and re-broken several times over. Then another face appeared, no two faces. Snape was first, calling him an arrogant troublemaker who couldn't even follow the rules of life and death. More verbal abuse rained down on him as the Dursleys continued their physical abuse, the two merging until the last face appeared: Dumbledore

Dumbledore stood behind that old desk of his that Harry hated so much, at first offering a lemon drop. Then with calm and excruciating detail Albus started in on all of Harry's failures and disappointments in the Wizarding world, with running deprecatory comments by Snape. The child inside Harry started to curl up into a ball, seeking some way to escape the pain wracking his body. He saw a troll wondering the hall, killing anything it came across before entering a girls bathroom. He tried to run to the bathroom, but stopped at the screams of both a girl and a boy.

Then he heard a unicorn's pain filled bleat as a ghostly version of Voldemort fed from its blood while he watched on in horror.

Then he saw student after student fall to a giant basilisk while the school went up in flames. Bodies of children were everywhere, some twisted into grotesque mockeries of pin-up dolls, some frozen with a look of fear on their faces. A maniacal laugh echoed in the background as the world burned around him. Body after body, face after face swirled around him, all his friends, all the people he knew, all the people he loved save two. 'Two...' he thought suddenly. The little boy inside of him started to uncurl as Dumbledore started in on his failure to protect them.

'No, you will not have them,' the little boy announced defiantly. The Dursleys' and the professors' abuse started to increase, the words and blows becoming even more biting than ever. But the little boy stood up, his fists clenched. He may not fight for himself, but woe betide those that threatened those his soul called his own. 'NO! YOU WILL NOT HARM MY 'MIONE OR MY LUNA!' the little boy inside him screamed in defiance. The blows now fell without notice, even as the body took damage that would drop anyone else. The little boy did

not make a move to defend himself, instead he rose his head up to the sky and called out, 'HEDWIIIIIGGGG!'

As sudden as the appearance of his hell was, it was nothing compared to the speed in which reality re-asserted itself. He was standing with a thick translucent tentacle stretching from him to the bonds holding Voldemort's soul piece (for now he could somehow tell that's what they were facing), and sub-zero blast of cold air and ice erupted from his shoulder as Hedwig appeared there. He then felt equal blasts of fire and earth from his other two loves as their familiars joined in the fray.

The blasts knocked everyone standing down, save their captive. Unable to move, the soul shard took the blasts full force as they mixed into one giant explosion, with it at the epicenter. Each of the phoenixes sung in defiance and challenge, joined in with an odd scream from the snorkack. The blast, which had been going inward to that point, exploded outward in a great shock wave that scorched the round outside Neville's shield bubble as far as the eye could see, blinding everyone.

It took a good while before the smoke and debris from the blasts cleared, leaving a severely damaged soul in the middle of three victorious young adults. Harry could tell their bondings had held, but they weren't the only things holding the thing. In addition to their bond, there was a two-person bond now entangling it from below. He could feel the identities of the people in this bond, which caused Harry to be filled with even more joy than the completion of the triumvirate bond. His parents were awake!

"Goodbye Tom, you've lost this one," a familiar and pleasant voice echoed as the scenery changed. Once again they were standing in front of an equally familiar mansion, with Clotho standing there. "Their bonds transcend everything, and no mere mortal, as you once were, can sever it. What the Light has put together you cannot defeat." With this the soul shrieked in pain and evaporated away, leaving nothing but the bonds behind. Slowly they faded from sight, leaving the three young adults to drift down and join the others.

“I think they've proven myself, my dark and dreary friend, what do you say?” an elderly man's voice commented from behind the group. It was so opposite from Dumbledore's that Harry's mind was instantly put at ease. A man holding an hourglass appeared above and behind them all, “standing” upside down with a wicked smile on his face. Beside him was a dark cloaked figure that was the spitting image of the modern version of Death itself.

Death then laughed jovially. His laugh wanted to make everyone else around laugh along with him, everyone save the five holding him firm. “Be at peace, Founders of the Future, Children of Time, Child of Fate, Child of Knowledge and Child of Fate. You have proven yourselves today. Now you can fully break that power which is the greatest of mortal weapons, the killing curse. I gift the once lost knowledge to you.”

One moment Death was there, and the next he was gone, only to appear just behind Harry, with his hand over the backside of his heart. “I claim my price though, Child of Fate, and none can gainsay me that.” Pain wracked Harry's body for what seemed like forever, but might as well have been a second where they were, if time could be counted there. Once it passed though, he felt lighter, happier. “I take your doubts of yourself, the lonely little boy too scared to speak or fight for himself, and he shall die. No more shall you doubt yourself or your friends. No more shall the Dursleys, Snape, Dumbledore, or any who seek to tear you down have hold. Let that doubt experience the chill touch of Death.”

Time was not done though as he appeared before Lily. “You evoked the Rite of Love's Sacrifice. The Lord and Lady of the Light have chosen your sacrifice. Are you ready?” At Lily's resolute nod Chronos touched her heart. A scream tore from Lily's throat that Harry never wanted to hear again. As it was he and Ginny rushed forward, only to be stopped by Fate. “HOLD!” Time ordered. “Just as none can gainsay Death his due, none can gainsay the price of her sacrifice.”

“W... W... What was it?” James asked as he rushed to help his wife as she fell to her knees in grief and devastation.

“We failed James. We couldn’t protect Harry. He still went to that thrice damned sister of mine! The portkey failed!” she finished in wail as she flung herself onto her husband overcome by grief. James was looking like he was not faring much better as tears rolled down his face while he held his wife close. The father then looked up to his son, pain and torment evident in his eyes. “I’m so sorry son. We tried. Damn it all, we tried everything!”

Harry felt his parents desperate sorrow, and could not help but to respond to it as he glided down to them. Time moved away, allowing the son to wrap his parents in his tightest hug. “I don’t blame you. I can’t. We all tried but it was not meant to be. It hurts, don’t get me wrong, it hurts a lot. But if you being here requires me to go through hell first, I’ll go and be thankful for every moment.” Everyone looked on in shock and disbelief at this proclamation. “What? I can still hate it, but I know I’ll never have to go back there again. I’m an adult, and now we can make them pay. It’s not like I’m having to live there again.”

“No mate, but you have to nearly die there again!” Ron’s voice cracked. “You have no idea how much that nearly shattered us.” Everyone from his original time nodded in agreement with that sentiment.

“No, I don’t know, save for the prayers of desperation I heard from Hermione and Luna. But that event started all of this, and gave us the chance to make our own way in the world, as well as our own lives. We would not have had that any other way,” he said as he walked over and clasped his “brother’s” shoulder. “Besides, me going through all of that got me my parents back. Remember what I always said? I’d give up the fame and money just to have them back? Well, I got my wish, even though the beginning of it all was terrible. So if that’s the price I have to pay to have events fall like they have, then so be it. I may not like it, or particularly want it, but by my timeline, it’s already done. We know I survive, because for me to be otherwise leads to paradox. So we just have to get through this one last time of living the life Dumbledore made for us before we take it in our own hands.” He sighed, shaking his head. “Mate, I know I’m not explaining this well, but can you see I’m chosing to look forward instead of

back? We need to save my younger self. We know how, so we do it, get them trained, then move on to what we need to do. And just remember, now the kid gloves come off. No more holding back to preserve the timeline. Now we act.” He then turned and looked at Death with a smile. “In a way you gave a gift by taking your price. I thank you for that.”

“I can die with that,” Death said with a smirk that was reminiscent of Sirius. The whole group broke into laughter, including weak laughs from James and Lily, who seemed to be doing a bit better with Harry’s words.

Still, James had to say what was on his mind, “Harry, you’ve seen me at my worst, and I’m sorry for that. It’s not often a man is humbled by his son, but I’m man enough to admit it. I’ll do better son, and I and the rest of House Potter will follow you Lord Gryffindor, no matter where you go. I don’t have the right, but I’m proud of you.”

Harry could feel his bondmates’ sense of impression at James’ words. And being truthful to himself Harry was also impressed by his father’s declaration. “You improved our final year, and much more before you married mum. I may not have been around, but I did keep tabs. You grew up already, so just continue on and you’ll be fine. Duke Gryffindor accepts the pledge of Lord Potter. And Mr. Hunter would like to thank Mr. Prongs for his support.”

“Mr. Prongs says your welcome to Mr. Hunter, and has to find some humor in being taught how to behave by his own son,” James said with another small laugh, which Lily joined in.

“Mrs. Redtooth thanks her son for teaching his father how to behave, and wonders just why we’re talking like this now?” Lily answered with the grief fading into mirth in her eyes.

“Mr. Hunter thinks this is quickly turning into a bonding moment between parents and son,” Harry responded, adding a rather pregnant pause that promised a zinger to come, “Even if Mr. Hunter is a year older than both Mr. Prongs and Mrs. Redtooth.” The last was said off-offhandedly, almost to the point of teasing with it.

It appeared to Harry, and to everyone around, that the Potters had not thought of that by the shell-shocked expression on their faces and the soft “Bloody Hell” that escaped from James’ mouth. Everyone then burst out laughing as the tense atmosphere finally broke.

“That may be true Harry, but remember you will always be our son. And I for one will want to get to know my son, and his lovely wives,” Lily added as she gave a gentle look to Luna and Hermione, “As soon as we can. Okay?”

Harry smiled widely and pulled both of his parents into a warm but fierce hug. “You’ll always be my mum and dad. I may not always show it, but don’t ever think that I don’t know that.”

“Well my Child, it’s time to go back. All your belongings are in my foyer. Are you ready?” Fate asked with a warm smile to the reunited family.

“Ready as we’ll ever be, my Lady,” Was Harry’s only response as he helped his parents up and joined his wives and family. “Ready as I’ll ever be,” he whispered to himself before facing his future.

A/N: Okay, they’re now back to the future, and ready to take on the world. The next chapter will probably fast forward to the point where Team Gamma originally leaves to head to the past, and from there we’ll start looking at all the collateral dam... er... others! Will Hermione reconcile with her parents? Will she be able to awaken the Ravenclaw Line? What about the Order? Who’s playing? Who’s being played? Tune in and find out!

Marauder names mentioned here:

Prongs – James of course

Redtooth – Lily Potter –Why? Well that's to be discovered yet. :)

Hunter – Harry Potter

And just for an interesting piece of trivia: the tentacles were actually the bonds the triumvirate shared. :)

Chapter 13: Back in the Saddle Again

Department of Mysteries
Ministry for Magic
London, England
July 6, 1996
Harry/Charlemagne's POV

Harry stood as he gave the last minute instructions to his younger self, and with a slight shove, sent the teens through the door to the planes. His group found themselves in an extremely weird situation having to deal with their younger selves, as they did not quite know what to think or feel. For example, Ron had to restrain himself around Susan, who he hadn't seen in six years, and not just because he was afraid of alienating the teen. No, he had to worry about his younger self becoming jealous on top of it all, and at the same time squelch his own jealousy issues. This led to a couple of very interesting and long talks between the older Ron and Harry, most of which left Harry feeling uncomfortable.

His mates had similar problems, only slightly askew. First they barely held on through the younger Harry's rescue despite knowing the youth would make it through. It quite frankly surprised Harry that his resuscitation was as close as it was, for by his memory Cedric all but kicked him back. Still, both women confessed it was as difficult watching their younger selves in near hysterics as it was to watch his younger self on the brink of death. If Harry were perfectly honest, it bothered him as well. He never liked watching those he loves in pain, and yet he had to watch the girls stand vigil. Harry of course renewed his vows to himself to make sure they never had to worry about that again.

Ginny and Neville seemed somewhat withdrawn for the first couple of days, but they bounced back pretty fast thereafter. Even now they wouldn't tell Harry what was bothering them during that time, but he could tell whatever it was had to have been pretty serious. Still the two worked closely together to be the emotional support for the rest of the team, leaving Harry's parents for Harry to deal with. One day Harry would have to thank them for making things at least that much easier for him. Even his mates understood that Harry would have to

spend these first few days acclimating James and Lily to their new reality, and that wasn't easy.

Harry's first test came after they got his younger self stabilized and into a recovery bed. Lily took one look at James, nodded, and then grabbed her wand to storm toward the door. The look on his mother's face was one of pure fury, and for once Harry was glad she never got that angry at him. But Harry couldn't let her go hex her family, and thus was put in the unenviable position of having to keep a very powerful couple from doing something that they would regret. Finally he managed to get them to compromise by working with the muggle system to ensure they were prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, with a codicil that they would eventually be turned over to the magical authorities. Having to keep the entire affair under the Secrecy Acts made things work slower, but at least it would ensure the Statute of Secrecy would be kept. Harry personally felt it tragic that the Dursleys would have to wait longer for a trial because of that. Really. Once the Dursleys were decided upon though, the team began to teach their younger selves. They had decided to use these few days to rest and re-acclimate (or in the case of James and Lily acclimate) to the year 1996. And bar a couple of emergency situations (courtesy of Dumbledore), that's exactly what they did.

But as the door closed and the spiders crisscrossed it, the time for relaxing was done. It was time to announce their presence to Jason and Croaker, not to mention Amelia and Susan. "If Jason, Croaker, and Amelia and Susan Bones would join us, it is time we started plotting our next courses of action," Harry said quietly to the rest of the group. After receiving acknowledgments from the named people, he led them all to the team room. There he waited until everyone was in before continuing. "Now that the Ministry six is gone, I would like to introduce you to the members of our team. At present no one outside of this room can know our true identities without our consent, for if certain people got wind of us before we're ready it could lead to problems we do not wish to deal with." After getting everyone's word, he lowered his hood.

Amelia gasped as she saw Harry's older face revealed. Stepping up she tentatively reached out a hand to touch it on his cheek as if making sure it was truly him. "I should have known," Amelia

whispered. "I didn't choose the Unspeakable names, but I should have known it was you. After all, you had to come back sometime. Not to mention Harry's ... your reaction when he saw your face. How are you doing?" There was so much that could be read in the question, but he knew she meant his emotional state.

Harry sighed and gave her a soft smile. "Overall I'm fine. I've got two lovely women that are my world, and family that actually loves me. But at the same time I'm very angry at a certain Chief Warlock, who has been lying to us all, and has done so much to me that no-one knows about that its frightening." He smiled as Lily gave a slight sniff at the first part while James snorted at the second. "But there's a lot to go over Aunt Amelia, so if you'll take a seat so we can give you an over-view?"

To this Amelia simply smiled, nodded, and caressed his cheek one last time before sitting down. "You must be doing better, you're no longer flinching at my touch. That's a good thing." Susan nodded adamantly and winked at Harry but otherwise remained quiet.

"Okay, Jason and maybe Croaker know who at least six of us are, but we'll cover all bases. On my right is Phoebe also known as Hermione Potter-Gryffindor-Ravenclaw, Liber known as Neville Longbottom-Hufflepuff, and Selene known as Ginevra Weasley. On my left is my left is Athena known as Luna Potter-Gryffindor, Sun Tsu known as Ronald Weasley, and two people no-one here knows, or more to the point remembers," he said with a mischievous smile. His parents winked at him and chuckled as he continued, "Second to the end is Raptor, known as James Potter, and Firebrand, known as Lily Potter."

Harry had to really strain to hold in his laughter at the gobsmacked expression on Croaker's face. Amelia's was almost equally as funny as he did not need legilimency to see the internal argument she was fighting with herself. "Geez Harry, someone really needs to teach you pacing. You dropped so many bombshells with that introduction Auntie Amelia doesn't know which to get a grip on first."

This of course elicited a reaction from James, "Tell me about it. We spent at least three of the six years they were in the past with them. And yet he still doesn't know how to deliver a decent punchline."

Harry of course couldn't just let that one go as he gave James an affronted look, "I can too give a decent punchline. What about the time I fooled Sirius into believing... No, that flopped. How bout when I told Remus... No, that one also failed. Oh I know! How about when.... no, that didn't work well either. Damn it you're right! I am bullocks at telling jokes!" Lily chuckled while James just mussed up Harry's hair a little more. "Hey, off the hair! I spend eight hours a night trying to get it in the "just woke up" style!"

At this the other team members started laughing, joined by Susan. The rest of the people there were far too shocked, which in a way gave Croaker a chance to wrap his head around what was just said. "Luna, are you happy?" Luna simply smiled and nodded vehemently. Croaker nodded and walked over to Harry to whisper in his ear, "Hurt her and I hurt you. Remember thou art mortal."

Harry laughed aloud at this, but it was evident he wasn't laughing at the threat. Instead he responded with, "You mean I'm not Mel Brooks?" Croaker was obviously happy Harry had caught the reference as he laughed and nodded, which relaxed Harry a bit. "You can have whatever they leave you," he explained as he hiked his thumb back up to his mates. Finally everyone settled down again and Harry continued, "Hermione, Luna, and I share the Triumvirate Bond, and we were married in a magical ceremony after we completed our N.E.W.T.'s in a very quiet and private ceremony presided over by Jason."

"Why don't I remember any of this, or them?" Jason interrupted with a slight frown.

"Because you had Harry obliviate you just before we left for Godric's Hollow. This way neither Dark Lord could get the information from you," Hermione stated for Harry. "Also note the names Harry called us by. We found that four of us are heirs of the four Founders. Neville, for example, is Hufflepuff's heir, through the standard means. Harry is

Gryffindor's heir, declared by his grandfather. James will take the duties of being the Potter Heir while Harry takes Gryffindor per the last wishes of the last Lord Gryffindor. The last two houses are represented, but a little tricky. The last of Ravenclaw's line had their magic suppressed as a result of a curse on the line. My gaining magical abilities broke the curse, so I will be claiming the Ravenclaw line. Once I have I can bring magic back to my line."

"Wait," Jason said with a raised eyebrow. "Your parents weren't exactly happy with our world when you left. Are you sure you want to do that?"

Hermione sighed and sent over the link to Harry, 'I somehow think they're more upset with me though. This is the first time I've ever defied them, and over something that they believe is a danger to me. Not to mention the fact I'm no longer a teenager.' Harry could only send over a feeling of support, which was further amplified by Luna's sending of similar feelings. "Yes. Pardon me Jason, but I know my parents better than you do. They'll have enough to be upset with me as it is. Having magic themselves just means they're no longer cut out of my life quite as much. It may go some of the way to mend the rift."

Jason's shrug practically screamed "if you say so," but he kept his mouth shut as Hermione gestured toward Ron. "Slytherin house will have to remain contested until the line war is settled, but having at least one of the contenders willing to stand up in public will give the other three Royal Houses the support needed."

"What do you mean line war? Last information I had, Gaunt was the last line of Slytherin," Amelia said, clearly shocked. "Are you telling me there's another line related to Slytherin? Even so, I thought the Gaunt line had already ended."

"Yes and no," Ron said as a frown formed on his lips. "The Gaunt line is... somewhat alive, if one could call Tom Riddle still of the Gaunt line. Does he still belong to that line?"

Jason and Croaker both held his breath at the revelation, clearly realizing the significance of the name. Amelia's expression was one of confusion turning to horror as Harry answered him, "Unfortunately he does. His physical body may no longer qualify him, as none of it came from his mother's side, but the marks are still on his soul, making him the magical heir. Which is enough for the purposes of the line war. Sorry Ron, but your war with Voldemort isn't going to end that easily."

Ron snapped his fingers in consternation, "Bullocks. Well, you can't blame a bloke for trying, can you?" As he turned back to the crowd he saw Amelia's horrified face and Susan's confused one. "Tom Morvolo Riddle was the son of Tom Riddle and Merope Gaunt. As the last of the male heirs died in Azkaban, that made Tom the last of the Gaunt line."

"That's fine Ron, but who is Tom Riddle?" Susan asked, clearly not understanding what was being said. Harry sighed and didn't wish this news on Susan in the least.

"Harry mate, you do it better than I do," Ron sighed as he crossed the room to pull Susan up. He turned her so she was facing Harry as he slipped his arms around her waist from behind. "I'm sorry love," he whispered in her ears.

Harry didn't even bother with his wand. Instead he simply waved his hand in the air as flames appeared writing out "TOM MARVOLO RIDDLE." Then he simply waved his hand again and the letters rearranged themselves to form "I AM LORD VOLDEMORT." Amelia stumbled backward and sat down hard as her sharp mind realized why this was coming up now. Susan was only a few steps behind her aunt, as a moment later she gasped and turned to face Ron. "You mean you're..."

Ron sighed and nodded slowly. "The Weasleys are the second Slytherin line. The line of inheritance falls in reverse order in the Weasley line. The youngest son inherits, according to the family charter. And just ensure the line continued, Salazar put a curse on the line to have only male children, and a lot of them. Family legend

has it that the line war would end only when a girl was born into the line.”

“That would be me,” Ginny said with a mock salute. “My birth broke the “boys only” part of the curse. I’m not sure about the fertility curse though.” It was obvious she was trying to lighten the mood, but it kind of fell flat when the Bones just looked at her in shock.

“But... Isn’t Harry supposed to be the one to defeat the Dark Lord? I mean, what about the prophecy?” Susan protested as she turned around, unshed tears in her eyes. “If you go through with this, you’ll die.”

“Yes, I am,” Harry said softly. He looked up into Amelia’s eyes and gave her the most caring gaze he could, “But Voldemort isn’t the Dark Lord referred to in that prophecy. He’s a puppet, unwitting and unwilling as he may be.”

This of course got Jason’s attention as he snapped out loud in protest, “What do you mean he’s not the Dark Lord? He’s spent decades trying to take over Wizarding Britain. All the death eaters follow him, and he’s been persecuting anyone not of pureblood decent for decades! He’s the very person we’ve been fighting, how could he not be the Dark Lord?”

Harry sighed as he sat down. “That box only contained some of your notes, didn’t it? You told me just before you had me obliviate you that you hadn’t put any of our findings in your reports. When I asked, you told me you’d give yourself some clues, but that’s about it.” When Jason nodded he sighed and pulled out a shrunken box from his jacket. “Jason, when we’re done here I’ll need you to get in contact with our Muggle counterparts. It’s time the Department activated its second, secret mission. We’re going to have to step up to serve the Queen as we take back the country from the true Dark Lord.”

“No...” Amelia gasped. If she hadn’t already been sitting down, she would have slumped into the seat. “You can’t mean... He’s the Leader of the Light!”

Harry walked over to Amelia, kneeled down in front of her, and put his hands on her shoulders so he could look into her eyes. "I'm afraid I'm not mistaken, Auntie Amelia. Dumbledore is the current Dark Lord. His whole family has been more or less in control of Magical Britain since the times of the founders." He then pulled the shocked woman into a hug as he explained loud enough for the rest of the room to hear. "The entire story behind the four founders split is a half truth. Yes, they did split originally, and part of the reason was the Pureblood Supremacy Movement, but that wasn't all. Salazar was convinced that Godric and the others were plotting against him, ending in an attempt not only on Salazar's life, but that of his family as well. The entire family left. It was only several years later that Rowena realized that Salazar was under the precursor of the Impirius curse. She alerted Godric, who sent some of his friends to break the curse. Most of the Slytherin line came back to Hogwarts, save the Gaunt line. The Gaunt line went dark, and that's the entire basis for the blood feud between the Gaunt and Weasley lines. For more information on that history, ask Ron later." Ron nodded at this as he held Susan close to him so he could apparently whisper in her ear.

Harry then went on to explain the true history of the British Magical World, including how the founders lines were hunted to near extinction by the Bumblebee line, who eventually became Dumbledore. He explained how the family was involved, running things behind the scenes for close to a millennium while a silent assassination war was waged against the founders heirs. Finally he ended in a recap of his own history thus far, including the tampering with the triumvirate bond and the obliations, and the assassination of the last Lord Potter before James. "He knew Peter was the traitor all along, and implanted a thought into Sirius's head to switch secret keepers. We managed to find Sirius' copy of the note describing the secret, and tracked James and Lily down."

"What I don't understand," Croaker interjected, "Is how did they survive the AK's? And what are those bodies we found? I mean, James and Lily are supposed to be buried at the Potter Ancestral Home. House elves came and claimed the body."

“Hermione found a variant of polyjuice that works on animals. We found two wild pigs, fed them the adapted potion, then AK’d them. Mrs. Crouch proved that if you die while under the effects of polyjuice, the body never changes back,” Harry explained the answer to the second question first. “As to the first answer, we have delved rather deeply into light magic, and we’re extremely close to finding a way to shield against the Avada Kedavra. Hermione and Dad tell me they’ll have the last part of the spell figured out within a week. We used what we had combined with the Ritual of Love’s Sacrifice to enable the family to survive the curse.”

“What kind of ritual is that?” Amelia asked, sounding confused. “I thought all rituals are dark.”

“No, not all,” Ginny said with a smile as she stepped up. “That line of thinking is what the Dumbledore family wants you to think, because when you pit a ritual against any quick-cast spell, the ritual wins out every time. It yet another way to remove power from the public. To put it simply, the ritual in question is putting the fate of the target in the hands of the Powers That Be. The outcome is based upon what The Powers think about a situation.”

“The Powers took a price,” Harry continued, “But it was a price that was rather easy to pay, all things considered. But they did bring to our attention one thing that will effect Ron’s ability to win his line war. Riddle took steps to prevent him from dying. We discovered this on our way back to this time when we had to fight a segment of Riddle’s soul.”

At this Croaker looked stunned, and fearful. “He couldn’t have. He made you into a horcrux?” the unspeakable asked fearfully. “Please tell me we don’t have to kill you to defeat him.”

Harry just smiled widely, both partially amused and serious at the same time. “Okay, you don’t have to kill me in order for Ron to destroy him. It just happens to be true though, as the bond me and my wives share, combined with my mother’s sacrifice, drove the soul fragment out of me, allowing us to destroy it. Fortunately I got the locations and item descriptions from the soul fragment before it went

to its destination, so retrieving the objects should be doable, but difficult. They're likely to be very well protected, and one of them will require negotiations with the Goblins. Fortunately I have a bargaining chip to deal with them." At the curious expressions everyone else wore he held up his hands to stop the inevitable questions. "Don't ask, I won't say, but a visit to the Goblin Nation is on our "to do" list."

At this Jason nods and sits down himself. This caused everyone else to sit down, with Ron sitting between Amelia and Susan. The room looked at Harry with anticipatory expressions, each one (except the Ministry Six) seeming to fairly bubble with anticipation. Harry just took a moment to quietly gauge everyone's body language before starting up, "We have two immediate, time sensitive actions we need to take, both of which are geared to keeping Dumbledore off guard. First, we need to arrange for my team to meet with the Queen of England. The Crown was supposed to have representation in our government from the start, but the Dumbledore line prevented that. We'll need to have the Crown's authority and help to begin bringing the government back under control, and away from Dumbledore. I can't say much here, but Amelia, I'll need you with us as head of the DMLE, for we'll need you to witness our negotiations. It's perfectly legal, as the Founding Families were charged to enforce the original agreement between the Council and the Crown. Part of the Department of Mysteries original charter was to be a military arm for the Founding Families should the families should they have need of it."

Amelia was going to object until Jason confirmed that was indeed part of the DOM charter. At this she became speculative and motioned for Harry to continue. "We have enough evidence on hand to prove who we are to Her Majesty's people, so once that is done we will be able to work from there. It just means some Royal Houses long thought extinct will be brought back. Fortunately the House of Windsor and the other four Houses are historically known as allies, thus the reasons behind the Founding Families' roles in our government. We'll simply be cementing these alliances. The second high priority mission will be for the group of us to go to Gringotts. People in the magical world have grown so distant from the non-magical one the proofs that will clear us in the non-magical won't do so in the magical. Instead, we'll need to rely on the Goblin Nation to prove that we are Founders Heirs. From there they'll be required to

announce it to the Wizengamot and the Ministry at large. I was hoping to have more time before we had to do this, but events forced Neville to announce himself sooner than we wished.” Harry shook his head ruefully at Neville and tried to pin him with a mock glare, only to have the other boy return a “what else could I do?” shrug. The rest of the room broke out into giggles at the boys’ shenanigans, but otherwise remained quiet. “Of course we’ll have to watch out for assassinations, physical, character, and otherwise, but that was a given in the first place.”

The room was silent for a few moments, then Team Gamma and the others began to work out other plans, including visitations to people personally important to them. Harry leaned back and relaxed while everyone talked around him, though he offered gentle encouragement to Hermione when the subject of her parents was brought up. The general consensus was that this was a conversation that would have to happen sooner rather than later, just like his parents’ talk with Remus. Both would more than likely happen before the meetings with the Queen and the talk with the Goblins, as the group decided to hold their resurfacing into the magical world until after the talk with the Queen. Dumbledore would know about them as soon after they left the bank, given the number of plants he had throughout the ministry. ‘We’ll go see them tomorrow love,’ he sent to Hermione, ‘Just you, Luna and me.’ He could tell Hermione was about to say that it wasn’t necessary for them to come along, but Harry cut it off before she could ‘verbalize’ it. ‘No love. We’re one soul in three bodies. You should know we won’t let you do this alone.’ He smiled at the feeling of gratitude that came from Hermione, along with the deep support of Luna’s. He only hoped he would be strong enough for it all.

12 Grimmauld Place
London, England
July 7, 1996
Remus Lupins’ POV

Remus was sitting at the kitchen table of his recently deceased best friend, wondering, not for the first time, where it had all gone wrong. A bottle of Ogden’s Old Firewhisky sat on the table, half drunk, while a

shot glass was cupped in the werewolf's hands, recently re-filled from his last drink. While alcohol normally did not effect his werewolf constitution, it did at least tend to take the edges off of his inner pain. Goodness knows he needed something, as the house he was currently staying in was about the furthest thing from where he needed to be as possible. The old place was dark and foreboding, with old furniture that could fit in some muggle haunted houses. The old wolf snarled at that last thought, after all, what was more perfect for a man with haunted thoughts but a haunted house?

For this was a man, a wizard, a werewolf, who was haunted by his past. Images of friends long gone and buried flitted about in his head, constantly accusing him of betraying them. This was not something that was unusual for Remus, for they had been doing this for years. But the latest addition of the last true Marauder seemed to be more poignant to him than any of the others, including possibly James and Lily who were a close second. Sirius at least never thought of him as a possible traitor to the Light, unlike James and Lily. Remus' snarl grew deeper as those memories came up, though the irony of how they were right all along was not missed on him.

When did he fall from the Light? When did he become the dark creature that everyone thought of him? Remus could not for the life of him figure that one out, though in the end it didn't really matter. When and why was not really important to him, not now. What mattered to Remus now more than ever was the regrets he held. Sirius' death had struck him hard, even he could see that in himself. Even though the death of his best friend was necessary in order to serve his master's needs, it was still a sacrifice he had wished he didn't have to make. He had truly loved the man, and was truly hurt when he thought Sirius had betrayed James and Lily to Voldemort. But then he learned his best friend was innocent, which soon became both the happiest and worst day of his life. Even if he did eventually have to work against him, for a few brief shining moments he had his friend back.

Remus slammed back his drink, savoring the warmth as it spread down his throat, and for a moment numbed the minor but growing pain at the base of his skull. Remus knew that he could stop the pain by dealing with his regrets. It would be alright if he just threw all the

pain and doubts he harbored away. The pain in his skull would stop, and he wouldn't have to do anything other than follow his master's orders. But the wolf inside of him would not let him do that very easily. It knew the truth, even if Remus couldn't admit it to himself. He had betrayed his pack, and the pup they were supposed to shelter and raise. Thus the wolf inside of him reveled in the pain, and considered it justice for his actions. Unfortunately his human side could not accept this punishment, and therefore tried to find something, anything that could give him peace, if only for a little while.

Remus was about to reach for the bottle to pour himself another drink when he was blasted back out of his chair by an explosion of ice. Instantly his wand was out in his hand as he drew up to his knees. Casting his eyes about he scanned the room in order to try to find out who did that, only to finally see a white and blew phoenix sitting on the table in front of him. His CoMC training told him this was an ice phoenix, one of the most rare forms of magical species known. But they were supposed to be legends! And yet here was one such legend now, standing on the table and studying him intensely. Inwardly Remus shuddered, this could get ugly if the bird wanted it to be.

And indeed in the next moment it became ugly, at least for Remus, as the bird stopped studying him and trilled a few short notes. It was a beautiful voice, but the biggest problem for Remus was that not only was he a "dark creature" but he had also accepted being marked by Dumbledore. And since he was technically a part of the dark forces, the cry cut through him like thousands of silver knives slowly slicing away his skin. His ears felt like they were going to burst from the beauty of the light creature's song, causing him to both drop his wand and cover his ears as he screamed in agony. Finally the song stopped as Remus fell to the ground twitching. He was unable to move as the phoenix flew down, grabbed him by his robes, and then flashed him out of the manor in a burst of ice. Unconsciousness quickly followed.

Remus found himself awakening in total darkness. What little he could feel led him to believe he was chained to some kind of chair, most likely a kitchen chair. He flexed his muscles slightly which had no effect other than to cause him pain, which made him nervous.

Ordinary kitchen chairs like this one should have snapped under that kind of pressure, but instead it felt like the chains were crushing him tighter as he tried to break free. So whoever had him here wasn't taking any chances, and likely considered him a threat. Thoughts of who could command an ice phoenix and know enough about him to hold him captive started to weigh heavily on his mind until he heard what sounded to him like a cannon shot, followed by a very distorted sounding voice, "Remus Lupin aka Moony, born March 10, 1960, Hogwarts Gryffindor class 1971-1978, Prefect, part of the infamous quartet known as the Marauders, known werewolf sired by Fenrir Greyback, Professor of Hogwarts in Defense Against the Dark Arts, member of the Order of the Phoenix. This is you, correct?"

Remus was shocked to say the least by the depth of their knowledge so far, but he would not confirm this for whoever this was. Instead he called the wolf forward a little and snarled, "Who are you and what do you want with me? Let me go now or there will be hell to pay."

Another distorted voice, though it sounded female, answered him in what sounded like a soft tone, "Please don't make this difficult for yourself or us Remus. We just want to ask you a few questions, and perhaps get your side of the story. We want to know what happened to you. Why did the phoenix song hurt you?"

The wolf inside of Remus snarled at this question, though his nose began to pick up something. Still there was no way what he was smelling could be true, so he decided to give the most obvious answer, "You said it yourself, I'm a werewolf. Now let me go!"

The male voice responded to his demand with a snort of dismissal. "Phoenix song only hurts feral werewolves when they are transformed Remus. You should know that better than anyone. So don't play us for fools. Why did it hurt you?"

"I don't know who you are," Remus snarled as he tried to strain against the chains, only causing him more pain, "And I don't know how you know so much about me, but I don't owe you any answers. Let me go now, for I'm not answering your questions."

“This was not how we wanted to do this,” the softer female voice replied. “We sent the phoenix to give you a message, or did you not notice the letter she was holding? If you had just looked and not snapped first, you wouldn’t be in this situation.”

“And do not insult our intelligence Moony. The spell on you prevents you from seeing and hearing properly, it does not effect your sense of smell. I know full well you can smell us, so what does that tell you?”

“I don’t know how you managed to mask your scents then, but there’s no way you can be who you smell like, James and Lily Potter have been dead for a long time. If this is some sick death eater trick, then I’ll gut you alive,” the werewolf replied. He was worried though, the chair should be giving by now, even if hardened. There was no way it should have been able to withstand his preternatural strength, but it was holding without so much as a single creek.

“Oh, there are ways, though we won’t be telling them to you right now,” the male voice answered before saying something in Latin. Suddenly a single figure appeared out of the darkness, dressed in gray hooded robes with the hood down. Never the less to say Remus was startled by this for more than one reason, not the least of which was that someone who looked a lot like James did just before his death stood before him now, wand in hand. “You might as well stop trying to break that chair, Moony, you’ll only hurt yourself trying to do so.”

Another similar incantation came from the female voice, only to divulge Lily standing there beside James. He could see a lot of conflicting emotions in the redhead’s eyes, most of which shamed him. He suddenly found himself not able to look at them, so he turned his head away in shame. He knew he betrayed them, and failed their son. Now he was convinced this was some kind of haunting in divine retribution for his past crimes and mistakes. He stopped struggling for the moment, grateful that the flush from his exertions could hide his blush of shame. He found himself unable to speak now as he was sure the ghosts of his past had finally come home to claim his soul.

“What happened Moony?” James asked again.

Remus turned back to look at him and nearly turned away again at the look of betrayal in his old friend's eyes. Still, if this was to be his eternal punishment, then so be it. Ghosts or not, his friends deserved an explanation. "Shortly after we finished our N.E.W.T.s and about two years before you died, I was approached by Minerva, who told me that Albus wanted to talk to me. I followed her, but instead of going to his office I was escorted to a clearing in the Forbidden Forrest. There Dumbledore stood with some of the inner circle of the Order of the Phoenix. I was asked to join their ranks as an inner circle member, and after some discussions I accepted. It was after my induction ceremony I was tasked with my first assignment: following Pettigrew."

"What do you mean by ceremony? And what is this inner circle? We're members of the Order as well, and we've never heard of any of this," Lily questioned.

"I... I can't tell you about..." Remus started as the pain in the base of his skull flared. He gritted his teeth to keep from screaming in agony as the mark punished him for attempting to describe it. Lily moved forward and tilted Remus' head forward so she could look at his neck. He resisted this heavily by whipping his head around to bite her, but soon found himself unable to move even that much. He then felt another presence behind him followed by another unfamiliar voice saying, "It's his mark alright. You should know it's probably hurting him like crazy right now. It has some advanced loyalty charms as well as some other locator spells mixed in."

"Are we in danger of being found?" James asked the man behind Remus.

"No, we figured out long ago how to block them. There's no way the old man can find us via the mark," the unfamiliar voice responded.

Lily stepped back as the spell keeping Remus from moving his head faded away. As she came into focus again he could see unshed tears in her eyes. "Oh Remus, why?" she breathed, pleading for some kind of explanation.

“I was told I’d be able to play a bigger role in the fight against not only You-Know-Who but those that had tried to deny us werewolves our rights,” the werewolf said sadly. “The inner circle doesn’t only work against the death eaters, but we also try to weed out those within the ministry that work against Albus’ aims. I just wanted to make the world a better place for werewolves.”

“But you found out differently,” James said, his still-distorted voice now sounding angry.

“Yes,” Remus said, “My first mission was to tail Peter for possible recruitment. You had already turned them down, for unexplained reasons, as did Sirius. I asked why, and they said they could not tell me. So instead I was to watch Peter and try to get him to join. There were several times I had suspicions about Peter though, and reported them to Minerva. But the Headmaster just told me to watch, never to bring him in. Finally you went into hiding, and the suspicions between us were starting to become obvious. Albus gave me another order then: I was to dig deeper into Peter’s contacts and report directly to him.”

“That would have been about the time our suspicions about you were growing stronger. You were disappearing for hours on end,” James said quietly. “We talked to Dumbledore about it when he cast the Fidelius, he told us he was monitoring the situation. Then Sirius suggested the switch in secret keepers, based partially upon our suspicions, and we did.”

“I heard about that from Albus. He told me he had refused to switch to Peter, based upon my reports about his hanging around suspected death eaters. Then you died... and I nearly went after Sirius. I would have, save the Aurors got him first.” Remus looked sad at this as the regrets swam to the surface. “I asked Albus what was going to happen to Harry, and that’s when Albus told me about his plans to send him to the Dursleys.”

“And you just let him?” Lily asked, or spat. This apparently was a sore spot with her, but Remus couldn’t lie about this.

Then it struck him, why couldn't he lie? Why was he saying anything? The mark was hurting even more, but something was prompting him to speak the truth anyway. He couldn't understand what was going on, but regardless he kept talking, "Yes, I did. Albus told me about the prophecy, and about his suspicions that your death could ruin everything we were working for if we kept him in the magical world. Even the chances of him going dark paled in comparison of what he could do if he were to be raised into his birthright. I didn't know until later what he meant by that, but by then it was too late and he had already gone through two years at Hogwarts."

"So let me get this straight, you sanctioned sending our son to hell to prevent a political shift?" James asked, his voice low and dangerous. "Our son nearly died because you and Tumbleduck were too worried about what he would do when he grew up if, heaven forbid, he was actually happy?!"

Remus winced at James' words, but could not deny the truth of that statement. Still he had to point out something in his defense, "I didn't know they'd treat him that badly," he said in a voice just above a whisper. "I thought they might have been a little hard on him, but nothing like what had actually happened."

"Then you were a fool, and forgot what they did at our wedding," Lily snorted, obviously angry now. "Or did you forget about Vernon trying to deck James while Petunia insulted me at the reception?"

Remus tried to remember that, but for some reason he couldn't. "No, I don't remember that, Lily." At the low growl that escaped her throat he looked up and into her eyes, though his were squinting from the increasing headache, "I swear! I don't remember it at all! I remember them insulting you quietly at the beginning of the reception, followed by Sirius ejecting them for you, but nothing about that!"

He felt lost in Lily's gaze for a few long moments as her eyes kept his from moving away. Finally she looked up and said, "He's telling the truth, he doesn't remember." She sighed and pinched her nose

before asking the next question, "So once you learned the truth about his home environment, what stopped you then?"

"At the time, there wasn't much evidence, at least according to Poppy and Albus. For them to remove him at that point they would have needed some kind of evidence, and Harry never came forward to complain, at least not to me," Remus said, inwardly cringing at Lily's gaze and James' silent accusations. "So I could do nothing more than wait. Then Sirius proved himself innocent, but because of Peter's escape, and Fudge's hard line, he had to flee. I tried to talk Albus into doing something, but..."

"But what?" James asked dangerously.

Even the wolf inside of Remus slunk backwards at James' tone. This was the pack alpha, and he was enraged. Remus knew it was his fault what happened next, and a part of him just wanted to flee. But he had to confess, and so he did. "Albus put two scenarios out in front of me. The first was that Harry went to live with Sirius. There he would learn about all of his inheritances, and would then take over his birthrights. But what would he do? We both could see how easy it would be for Harry to carry things too far, to give too much to the other species, to the muggleborns. We could even see him trying to unify the muggle and wizarding worlds again, and the blood bath that would come from that. Or, if he would stay at the Dursleys, his view of the muggle world would be further dimmed, and he would learn restraint. He would learn there were reasons for the Statute of Secrecy and other such laws. He could be taught to put his trust more in those that were more experienced. We could start to mitigate the damage from the abuse, and perhaps show him how to use that for the Greater Good."

His interrogators were silent at this revelation, though it was a deep foreboding silence that did not promise anything good for him. "At the time, it seemed like the only good response was to let him stay with his relatives. It seemed like the right thing to do."

James looked at Remus a long time before he turned around abruptly. Remus could see his entire body shaking with rage, though it was

nothing compared to Lily's expression. "I'm muggleborn, if you didn't remember," Lily said. The werewolf could feel the ice in her voice freeze his entire world, leaving it in sub-arctic temperatures. "You tried to turn him against his heritage, and you call it for the Greater Good? You allowed my son to be abused to maintain a status quo where twenty percent of the population suppresses and abuses the other 80 in the name of tradition? You allowed my only son to be nearly killed to continue a world where you are treated worse than a second class citizen for a few measly scraps? You helped in the persecution of an innocent man, just to keep control of child for the sake of political expediency?! I thought you were our friend. Even when James was at his worst, and I was so angry with him, you were always the sane one. You at least I could relate to. You at least were a friend, especially when I lost Severus as a friend. And now I find out you're just like Severus. That's it, we're done."

"Wait..." Remus protested, but it was no use. He found himself looking at Lily across her wand as she snarled out one word, "Obliviate."

Remus woke up on the floor in the kitchen of Grimmauld Place. He couldn't remember how he got there, but he did remember a dream. Tears rolled down his eyes as he curled up where he was, desperately holding onto the dream image of Lily's furious tears mouthing one word over and over again, "Traitor." Tonks found him there several hours later, though she could do nothing more for him than put him in bed.

Granger Residence
Outskirts of London, England
Same Date/Time
Hermione's POV

Hermione strode up to the door of her house, the house she grew up in for 16 years, save the time she spent at Hogwarts. And for the first time she was very nervous. She was worried what her parents would say to her, or what they would do. Would they let her in the house? Would they listen to her? What would they think about their daughter returning to them six years older, much less with not one but two

lovers, never mind being told they weren't what they thought they were? These were all weighty questions to be sure, but none of them compared to the greatest question on her mind, could they forgive her?

Growing up, she was a bright and inquisitive girl, if not lonely. She was compassionate and idealistic, and that combined with her love of knowledge pushed away the children her age. Looking back, she could easily see she used her knowledge as a shield to keep her peers from hurting her. But that left her a bit overbearing, a bit of a know-it-all. Children never responded well to that kind of person, so she was ostracized by her peers. Adults however seemed to like smart children, especially her parents. So instead of a rich childhood amongst her peers, she had a rich childhood with her parents. She would obey them most times without question, and even when she had to question, it was always polite.

But that changed when she went to Hogwarts. Her parents were supportive of her decision, even if they were a little confused and hesitant. They had loved their close relationship with their daughter, but her years at Hogwarts drove her further and further away. At the end of her first year, she told her first believable lie. It was a small one, but it was a lie just the same. She had told them she would not have followed Harry into that final Chamber, even if she could. They weren't happy with the idea of any child having to risk their life like that, but as long as Hermione could have stepped back and take a supporting role, they would not stop her. From there, the lies grew over the years, until just after their O.W.L. exams and the Department of Mysteries. That's when the lies fell apart.

There was no hiding the fact that she could have very easily died at the Department of Mysteries, nor was there any denying just how involved she was in the war. Her parents had received the standard letter advising them what happened, and they wanted answers. Thus for the next hour after they got home they drilled her extensively, going over each year, slowly uncovering the lies she told. Finally they asked her if, knowing what she knew now, something similar came up would she do the same thing again. She could only answer yes, stating that she would never leave Harry. Then her parents put their foot down, saying they were going to withdraw her from the magical

world. That's what started the silent war that Luna and the two other Unspeakables walked in on. That they wanted her to leave the magical world was bad enough, but leaving Harry was something she just couldn't do, even if she didn't understand why at the time.

Then she left with the Unspeakables, only to have them show up a few days later with emancipation papers to sign. Their message to her hurt, as no doubt the very fact she was asking for emancipation hurt them. She hadn't meant to hurt them, but short of showing up on their doorstep to explain everything it was going to hurt. Jason himself had tried to speak to them, but since he didn't know the entire story there was little he could have done to cushion the blow. So they likely thought she didn't want anything to do with them, or worse that she hated them. Would they even listen to the reasons? Would they even care? She blinked back tears that were threatening to spill at the thought of them slamming the door in her face, but found for some reason she could not knock.

As she stood there with her hand raised she felt a warm, gentle, male hand rest on her shoulder, sending wordless thoughts of love and assurance down their bond. Her female lover simply rested her hand on top of Harry's and echoed his feelings. This caused her to look back and give them a watery but thankful smile as she turned and knocked on the door. From their receptionist's explanation they both should have been home, even though they were about to go on vacation. So this was likely the best time to reach them.

"One moment," a male voice sounded from down the hall and through the door. She surreptitiously pulled her wand and pointed it at her face, ready for when her father opened the door. But after a moment she decided it would be best if she did it in front of both of them, mainly to keep the neighbors from noticing anything. A man of medium height, very thin muscular build, and brown hair and eyes opened the door. "Can I help you?" he asked in cautious and cool voice.

"Dr. Granger, may we speak inside? I have a message from your daughter," Hermione responded, her voice choking and thus distorting it even further than the robes would do already. She

crossed her fingers on her non-wand hand at this point, hoping that he wouldn't just turn her away.

"I'm surprised that she even thought to send us a message," her father replied. Even with the sentiment he stepped aside to allow the three unspeakables entrance.

Hermione had to use her occlumency to choke back a sob at the compliment. She knew it would be hard, but she wasn't counting on it being this hard. She had thought she had dealt with the feelings that she abandoned them, but the old fears came back with just a few words. Still, this needed to be resolved, and the only time she could do it is now. So she shored her feelings up and stepped inside, keeping her voice as calm as she could. "She does think of you Dr. Granger, a lot. That's why we're here today. Is your wife at home?"

Dr. Granger nodded and motioned them to follow him, obviously biting back another hurt comment. Hermione had to remind herself that to them it was only a week and a half since their fight, and only a week since they were served with her emancipation paperwork, with little explanation. Of course they would still be hurt. But what surprised her was the stack of boxes sitting just off the stairs, as well as the ones in the living room. They were labeled with Hermione's name, each one specifically labeled as to their contents. Of course they were packing up her stuff, they had to think she was never coming back. The question was whether or not she would ever be welcome even for a visit. The answer to that would tell her just how betrayed they felt. "Paulina, these three people are here with a message from our daughter."

Hermione stepped in the room and took a quick glance around. The room was still as roomy as usual, with real fireplace on the opposite wall with a couch facing it. Her mother was on the love seat to the left of the fireplace. There was a single chair to the right of the fire place, with a large empty area where a thick woolen rug was spread out. Hermione could remember long nights snuggled up either in the chair or on the floor with a book as she quoted parts of it to her parents. Now, however, her mother uncurled herself from the love seat with a desperate look on her face. "What is it? Is she hurt? What does she want now?"

Hermione took one last split second to steel herself up inside before drawing her wand out to point at herself, "Ostendo sum mihi ut Paulina Jean Granger. Ostendo sum mihi ut Richard Jacob Granger." She then braced herself as her parents blinked, uncertain of the spells effects, until they looked into her hood.

Paulina was the first to recognize who it was standing before her, and from all indications he must have come as a shock to her. Her father recognized her a moment later and fell hard into the love seat. "Her... Hermione?" the elder Granger woman asked, as if trying to make sure she was indeed speaking to her daughter. "What happened?"

"Yes mum, it's me," Hermione answered as she took a couple of steps forward. Harry and Luna repeated the same spells she had cast, then took off the hoods to reveal who they were. "There's a lot that's happened since I left here with Luna and the Unspeakables, and I thought... well... I need... no, I want you to join me."

"We don't want to be in the middle of your war," Richard replied. "Besides which, you made it perfectly clear you didn't want us in your world, so why would that change now?" Hermione's father sat up straight in the love seat, a stern expression on his face. Hermione could see the pain behind it though, the pain caused by her lies, and it broke her heart.

Her first instinct was to hide her pain, but she realized that if she came off emotionless it would just make things worse, so she allowed her eyes to fill with tears as she made a plea to her father. "I'm sorry I lied to you all those years," she started, staring directly into his eyes and pushing forth the regret she felt about doing so. "I never meant to make you feel like I didn't want you in my life. I never meant to make you feel like I was ashamed of you. I'm not ashamed of you, and I never was. Even if you refuse to rejoin our world, I will never be ashamed of my parents. How could I be? You made me much of what I am, deep inside today. But I realized I strayed from the values you taught me, I strayed away from being honest with you, even if some of it was inadvertent. And for what I have deliberately done I'm sorry."

Reactions seemed mixed between Hermione's parents. Her mother appeared to be happy to a point, her daughter was standing in front of her admitting her mistakes, and apologizing for hurting them. The motherly love warred with the confusion at some of her words, though it looked like Pauline was at least going to give her a chance. Richard on the other hand still looked upset, if not a bit indignant. "What do you mean, inadvertent and deliberately? Are you saying that pushing us away with lies and deceit was not your fault? I thought we raised you to take responsibility for your actions, not sluff them off on someone else."

Hermione could feel Luna wanting to say something, but she begged with her lovers not to interject anything right now. Her parents were emotionally distraught, and would take any intervention as being ganged up upon, which would not go well for them. Instead she asked them mentally to sit on the couch while she took the single chair in hopes of eliminating the subconscious "talk down to you" reaction. She lent forward in the chair though, placing her elbows on her knees and folding her hands in a pleading gesture as she responded with an open and honest facial expression. "No daddy, I'm not saying it wasn't my fault. There were more than enough conscious decisions on my part to hide the truth from you to place at least 85 to 95 percent of the blame on me. Even so, my lies were never meant to push you away, or to make you feel like you weren't a part of my world. They were meant to avoid having you pull me out of the magical world earlier than you tried. I knew the dangers, and I had made commitments. I wanted, no, needed to see those commitments through. What I am saying though is at the time, I didn't know myself the full reason why I had that need. That wasn't my fault. Someone had been manipulating me by, among other things, memory erasures." At her father's look of disbelief she let more tears run down her face as she added on, "Daddy, it was to the point that when I left here, I didn't even know half of my own reasons, and almost none of my own real feelings. And the only reason I knew as much as what I did was that someone was trying to do the impossible"

Her father appeared to at least consider her words for a moment. Even though she was not directly answering his questions, she was

attempting to answer the feelings behind the questions. Still, he appeared to not be totally convinced, though her mother appeared to be much more so. Both father and daughter watched as Luna got up and went into the kitchen, then he turned back to Harry and said, "Before I go on any further, I would like to know who my daughter brought into our house. I'd like to know who's seeing the skeletons in my closet, and why."

Hermione felt a surge of panic. The entire reason for her father being angry in the first place was sitting on his couch, and she did not know how her father would react when he found out. Furthermore, she had no idea how to guide Harry in what he would respond with. So it was with a sense of dread that she waited for her mate to answer. "Sir, let me start by apologizing to you for all the problems that have come up between your daughter and yourself because of me... because of us really. None of us ever meant for you and your daughter to become estranged. In fact, had I known what was going on, I would have begged Hermione to tell you the truth, as far as we knew it anyway, even going so far as to volunteer to be there with her when she told you. After all, I don't really have a family of my own besides Hermione and Luna, so that makes me rather protective of them," Her husband stood up but kept his posture and body expressions open as he extended his hand out to Richard. "I'm Harry James Potter, or at least that's the name I was born under. My current name is slightly different now. The young lady making tea in the kitchen is Luna Gryffindor. We're your daughter's husband and wife."

Hermione didn't even have the time to wince as Richard was out of the love seat swinging. The older man's fist amazingly enough connected with Harry's chin, sending Harry sprawling down to the floor. It took a split second to see that Richard wasn't going to stop, despite Pauline's pleading, before she stood up and with a silent apology ejected her wand to defend her husband. Two spells later and Richard was sitting back on the love seat bound by thick ropes and silenced. Luna poked her head out of the kitchen and said, "Hermione, you shouldn't curse your father you know. It's generally not the best way to get a parent to listen. Mrs. Granger, what do you and Mr. Granger take in your tea?"

Pauline, who was about to be in hysterics, was totally derailed by Luna's comments. "Sugar for me and sugar and light cream for Richard. There's a service above the stove. It probably would be best if you just brought it in here," she said, obviously even more confused than before. Still, her motherly instincts took over as she added to Hermione, "Er... Luna was it? She's right Hermione. Please remove the spells from your father."

Hermione stood there in silent debate with her husband and her wife even as she was helping said husband off of the floor and back to the couch. Finally she turned and looked to her father and said, "I'm sorry for cursing you. But Harry is my husband as much as he is Luna's. And Luna is as much my wife as she is Harry's. It is a true triangle relationship, and there was no coercion or blackmail or any other kind of foul play to make this happen from anyone. In fact, if truth was told, there was more coercion, manipulation, and spellwork employed against this union than could ever have been for it. I know it doesn't fit with your beliefs daddy, but I love my husband and my wife very much, and I will defend them against any harm, even you. But I beg of you, please don't make me do so again. I would much rather you be happy for me." With that she removed the spells and re-pocketed her wand, waiting for her father's next move.

The only sound in the house for the moment was the clacking of tea pots, cups, and other things from the kitchen as Luna worked in the kitchen. Harry was sitting there rubbing his jaw. Even though he had intentionally stood there and let the man hit him, it still hurt. Hermione could feel it through the bond, and sent some conciliatory feelings through the bond, even though she was not taking her eyes off of her father.

Richard on the other hand simply sat up straighter, appearing to think things through for a moment. He clearly was not expecting either of Hermione's responses, either the attack or the lecture, and was unclear as to how much of the lecture he could believe. Still, self-preservation apparently won out over protectiveness as he answered her, "How do you know that you weren't manipulated into believing what you just said? We brought you up to believe in marriage as one man and one woman, yet you are in a three way marriage. All this over a few days? Even if it appears you have aged six years, that still

doesn't mean that your entire beliefs could have possibly changed over a period of a week and a half. Even you admitted there was some manipulation going on, though by your words it was against this union, not for it."

Hermione took a deep breath and prayed to whatever powers that were listening that her father would not flip out again, "Daddy, for you it has been a week and a half since I last saw you, for me its been over six years. By the calender I'll be 17 in September. By my actual personal time frame I'll actually be 23. Harry will be 22 in July, and Luna will be 21 in a couple of weeks. We all went back in time to 1975 to spend six years not only completing school, but to further train for the war that's happening now. In fact, we even ran into you once."

"That's impossible," Richard answered as he was so surprised by the last part that he missed the first part. "I would have recognized you if you had. Besides, I was with Her Majesty's Army at that time."

Hermione shook her head and cast a glamor charm on herself, reverting to the face of Haleigh once again. Her father let out a gasp as he instantly recognized the face. He couldn't refute it as there was no evidence of that mission in the house, it was a secret mission after all. Once she was satisfied her father recognized her, she dropped the glamor once again. She waited for a few minutes while Luna brought in the tea service from the kitchen. Once everyone had tea and Luna was once again seated, her father cleared his throat. "Okay, I believe you on the relationship issue," he said quietly.

"Richard!" Pauline rebuked him, "What do you mean you believe them? How on earth can one change of appearance convince you when your own daughter's protectiveness couldn't?"

"I'm afraid he can't tell you that Mrs. Granger," Harry spoke up for the first time since he had been hit. "The details of what he knows is considered under the State Privacy Act as it applies to the military. It would be best if you forgot anything about him meeting us in the past, and don't ask any further questions."

“I thought something was bloody well off,” Richard grumbled as he turned to his wife. “He’s right love, I can’t tell you much of anything about that time. All I can say that doesn’t break my secrecy oaths is that I did indeed meet them before, and commented on their relationship...” He then stopped talking as his face adopted a horrified expression. Quickly he turned toward Hermione and breathed, “Please don’t tell me what you said back there was true. Or at the very least, tell me that keeping you apart was all he did.”

Tears that had since dried up started flowing anew as Hermione shook her head. “I can’t Daddy. I’d be lying, on both counts. The truth is a hundred times worse. The old man wiped our memories, used diversion spells, used confusion charms, and just about everything else he could think of to keep us apart. And I’ll thank my lucky stars that he wasn’t successful, for if he had been I would have lost Harry back when we first returned from Hogwarts this summer.”

Pauline looked even more confused as she looked between her husband and her daughter. Finally the Granger matriarch turned toward the young man in question and asked, “What does she mean by that?” It was obvious she was hoping they were exaggerating.

Harry was normally uncomfortable talking about his home life, and this situation made him even more so. All Hermione could do was send some love and support as he explained about what happened when he got home, how he wound up nearly dying, how Unspeakables saved him from certain death, and how Luna’s and Hermione’s voices allowed him to return to the land of the living. He even went as far as to tell them about meeting Cedric and getting his tail metaphorically kicked for blaming himself for the young man’s death. Finally he ended it with, “If Dumbledore had succeeded in breaking our bond, one of two things would most likely have happened. Either we would have, all three of us more than likely, died the moment the bond broke, or Hermione and Luna would have both been at the very least driven certifiably insane and I would have died any number of times, at the very latest this last time with my relatives.”

“Wait,” Richard said, his voice grimly angry once again, “What do you mean by breaking the bond? I never understood that part.” Pauline nodded almost frantically next to her husband, clearly getting more and more distraught as she listened to the story.

Hermione simply joined Harry in looking over to Luna to provide this explanation. The blond member of this trio sighed and shook her head in mock exasperation. “Fine, fine, leave it to the looney to explain wizarding practices...”

“Luna Gryffindor nee’ Lovegood! You are not LOONEY!” Hermione interrupted in indignation before she realized that Luna was pulling a rare joke. “I swear you have picked up all of Harry’s bad traits...”

“Hey!” Harry objected, only to be cut off by Luna again.

“Now, now, children,” Luna said while wagging her finger at them in an impression of Molly Weasley, “Hermione’s poor parents are very distraught, and our playful bantering is not doing anything to help them.” The blond woman then turned toward her parents-in-law and started to explain, “I’m sure you’ve heard about “love at first sight,” right?” Once both parents were nodding in agreement she continued, “It happens rarely in the non-magical world, as I’m sure you know. It’s just as rare in the magical one, and normally its between just two people. But in the magical world it’s also a lot more detectable, and has further reaching consequences than in the non-magical one due to our magic. Once a person meets their soul mate they start to share not only an emotional connection, but a magical one as well. And while they can be separated before their bond is sealed, it is not pleasant for them in the least. It can lead to moodiness, anxiety, withdrawal from one’s personal life, and in some cases mild to moderate pain consistent with an extended period.”

The Grangers looked at each other, blinked, then looked over to Hermione in partial recognition. They nodded looked at each other once again before turning back to Luna so Pauline could ask, “I assume these symptoms go away once they’re near their bonded, if that is the word for it, again,?”

Luna smiles and nods emphatically, "The snarling snufflewumps leave once a bonded person is once again in contact with their other half." This statement of course drew looks of confusion from the Grangers while Hermione motioned for them to just drop it. They were used to Luna's defense system, besides, snarling snufflewumps may actually exist as far as they knew. Luna of course ignored the looks and motions and continued on, "Once the bond is solidified with a kiss, the witch and wizard's magical core and soul unite to become one. At that point the magical world considers the witch and wizard to be married, as they were joined by the Creator. By the Creator's own edicts, it is a mortal sin to break apart such a bond once it is truly formed. The person doing it could wind up dead, if not worse."

Richard, fortunately, seemed a bit calmer now as he listened to the conversation. "Okay, well that explains at least Harry and Hermione, but where do you come in? Doesn't this bond mean that they can't do anything out from each other?"

Luna refrained from actually clapping in excitement from Richard's observations and simply awarded him with a wide smile, "You're right, it normally would. But as Harry, and anyone who truly knew him would tell you, nothing about him is truly normal. You see, what Hermione and Harry share is not a simple soul bond, but two legs of a Triumvirate Bond. A triumvirate bond, in simple layman's terms, is a soul bond between three people, not two. Every rule I just mentioned applies, including the penalties for breaking the bond, even by removing just one person. If the bond breaks its like a part of you died, the rest wants to follow the lost piece."

The room was silent for a few long moments as the Grangers took that last statement in and emotionally and intellectually digested it. Finally Pauline asks one more question, "What happens if one member of this bond dies?"

Luna clearly did not want to answer that, so she looked to Hermione since they were her parents. She nodded and looked her mother in the eyes solemnly as she replied, "The other members of the bond die, usually within a few minutes mum."

Richard frowned deeply at this answer, his fists gripped in front of him. "You mean to tell me... Wait, you said Dumbledore? As in Headmaster Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts? You mean to tell me he tried to keep you three apart, even going so far as trying to break your bond?" At Hermione's nod he growls in anger, "He has to have known what he was doing. How could he not? You mean to tell me he was trying to kill my daughter? And the two of you?"

Hermione knew if she didn't derail him here he'd just gain momentum and start making edicts before truly thinking. Pauline also seemed to recognize the warning signs and simply put her hand on his arm and tugged. This seemed to make him pause while Hermione answered the question and at the same time bringing things back to the issues between them, "Yes, daddy, he did. But don't worry, he will eventually be punished for that and other worse crimes." She let her father mouth the words "worse crimes" before she continued on, "But right now I need you to forgive me for lying to you. I never meant to hurt you. I never meant to make you think you weren't wanted in my life. You can ask Harry, Luna, Ron, or any of my other friends in the magical world, I missed you terribly. There was nothing I wanted more than to bring you into the magical world. I knew that if I did, I wouldn't have to lie to you. I knew that if I could just do that, I could make you understand why I could not leave it, or Harry behind."

Both Pauline and Richard raised their eyebrows and looked toward Luna who answered their unasked questions with, "Due to Dumbledore's manipulations and spellwork, none of us suspected anything. And Hermione and I never could even become true friends until this last year, by your time."

Hermione nodded and continued on, "I never even suspected anything about the triumvirate bond. Because of that, I can't in all good conscience blame it for lying to you. No, I lied because the magical world was the first place I had friends. And it was where Harry was. And I felt I could not leave him, no matter what. I also wanted to know everything about as much as I could. So I could not let you take me away. I couldn't even tell you why I felt that way. But I did. I know now I should have sat down and told you the truth. Because I didn't you rightfully felt betrayed when you found out about my lies. And for that, I'm truly sorry."

Richard turned to look at Pauline for a moment, then whispered into her ear. Everyone sat in silence as the two had a semi-silent conversation, which ended after what seemed to be hours, but was more likely just a few minutes. Richard then nodded to Pauline who looked to Hermione and said, "We forgive you, Hermione. We can understand now what you were feeling, and why you did what you did. Yes, a part of you was being greedy, and unthoughtful. But from what... Luna? was telling us, that was a small part. The rest was likely your subconscious rebelling against the memory charms and other spells. Your mother and I can recognize those symptoms she was describing, we saw it in you every year when you came back. That's what finally convinced us, especially your father. You may not have known it consciously, but deep down, you knew something was happening, especially when every letter you sent home was mostly about Harry, and last year a increasingly growing part about Luna here."

Her father nodded as his wife spoke. His expression toward Harry was no longer hostile, in fact he bore a small, but apologetic smile on his face, "Harry, I am sorry about hitting you. You did not deserve that in the least. You did make it very clear that both my little girl and Luna were equal in your heart, and in the relationship. Given what you all have told us, that's about the best thing I can hope for." He then turned toward a very nervous Hermione and stood up to cross the distance between them. He stopped a foot away and opened his arms wide, offering a hug. Hermione was so grateful that he understood and forgave her that she jumped up into her arms and cried. It was at least fifteen minutes before father and daughter broke apart, during which time her mother hugged everyone, including the two of them. Finally the five of them sat down, Hermione joining her lovers on the couch, before her father brought up the next point, "Hermione, what did you mean when you said you wanted us to join you? We can't do much in the magical world. And won't they look down on us, with us being muggles?"

Hermione winced at the word muggle as Harry's face fell into a deep frown. Harry really did not like that word, as he thought it just further segregated the magical and non-magical world and perpetuated the prejudice between the two cultures. Hermione sighed and shook her

head before saying, "Daddy, Mum, please don't call yourselves muggles ever again. I know it was explained to you differently, but we discovered that when it was first come up it was derived from the term, "muddles" which the Wizards and Witches called non-magical people. It was an insult, calling you no higher than mud. Its were the term "mudblood" comes from." She once again sent a feeling of ease to Harry, who inwardly prickled at that word as well. "Sorry, I've been called that word too many times. It's a very big insult, meaning I have mud for blood. The so-called "pureblood" supremacists use that as an ultimate insult. So please, just say non-magical?"

Both of her parents nodded in agreement as they put their arms around each other. Apparently they did not like that word either, and now shared her revulsion for the term muggle. Once they leaned back she continued, "Mum, Dad, I discovered something of interest that will change your lives as much as it has changed mine. Mum, you're not non-magical. And neither are you dad, not really."

Pauline looked confused at this comment and tilted her head to the side. "What are you talking about?"

"Mum, there's a very prominent heritage line of magicals that extends down the distaff side of the family, passing from mother to daughter through the generations. The line comes from one of the Four Founders, Rowena Ravenclaw. Unfortunately the minor part of her lines fell victim to a curse about 500 years ago that sealed away their magic. The primary Ravenclaw line died out a hundred years later, leaving the secondary line as the main line," she explained. Her father was the first person to get where she was going with this, causing him to look at his wife with awe. "It's that line, through first daughters, that you and I are descended from. And through a remarriage with Grandpa, where the legal heritage re-joins the line."

Paulina blinked for a moment and peered into Hermione's eyes, "But your grandfather put you down as legal heir, not me."

Hermione smiled as Harry and Luna put their arms around them. "Yes mum. And by the laws of magic itself, at least so much as I understand them, that makes me the primary heir to the line of Ravenclaw. I was the first to break the curse on our line, thanks to

Dad's inclusion into our lines, so I am the first magical and legal heir of Ravenclaw in four hundred years. Which is good since the war is about to heat up and I'll be a central part of it. But that doesn't mean that you have to be without magic as well. You see, now that I've broken the curse, I have found the incantation, and more importantly meet the requirements, to break the curse for the line. You are magical mum. And you will be able to practice magic as soon as I can arrange the time and place to perform the ritual."

"What about me?" Richard asked tentatively. "I thought you implied we were both magical."

Hermione smiled and nodded emphatically to her father. "Your line had the same problem, but only as of 300 years ago as the first Wizard arose from a family of squibs. Your family came from an offshoot of the Dagworth-Granger line, which is nowadays considered some of the premier potioneers of the modern age. For a long time they were known as simply the Dagworth Line, but three generations ago they changed their last name to the hyphenated one. No one knows why, but I can guess that it is simply as a nod to their heritage. I don't know about any legal inheritances, that's something for the Goblins to advise you on. Even so, you'll be part of the ritual as well."

"So you're not a first generation, but in fact actually a "pure-blood?" Richard asked inquisitively.

"In the inbred parts of magical society I could be considered amongst the purest of the purebloods," Hermione answered, shrugging. "Not that it matters to us any at all. To be honest, our heritages only matter so far as how we can use them for the upcoming war. I mean, it's good to know where we came from, but we care more for where we're going. The name of Ravenclaw carries with it a large amount of political power and social responsibility. We need those for a major part of the war. This war is not going to be fought solely on the battlefield, but also in the chambers of the government and the halls of our schools. And the worst part of it all is our enemy isn't who we thought he was initially. No, Voldemort is merely a distraction."

“If this Voldemort isn’t your major enemy, then who is?” Richard asked as he began to understand the scope of the war they were talking about.

“Voldemort is an unknowing puppet of our true enemy, Dad. He and his family have held the magical world in darkness for a thousand years. He is none other than Albus Dumbledore, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards, and Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.” It would take a long time for Hermione’s parents to recover from that revelation, during which the Gryffindor-Ravenclaw family covered everything that was going on in the magical world, past and present. In the end, as the Grangers packed their things, they acknowledged they were very thankful the “kids” were now out of school.

Chapter 14: Effective Government

Potter Manor

Wales

July 24, 1996

Hermione's POV

The last two and a half weeks were interesting, at least according to Hermione's point of view. The fact that Dumbledore lost his original bid to regain control of Harry did not seem to slow the man down a bit. Instead the true Dark Lord started to work behind the scenes, slowly eroding people's confidence not only in Amelia, but the Department of Mysteries itself. The old man was subtle though, if you did not know him and his methods, you would never be able to detect his maneuverings. It had reminded Hermione of just how careful they would need to be, for the slightest slip up could mean the difference between success and death for them. Even now, Ron and Neville were out amongst the witches and wizards of the Wizengamot trying to counter the old man's rumors, while at the same time laying the groundwork required for the Founder's Heirs. Neville of course was the biggest asset they had since he, in his Unspeakable persona, was known to be a Founder's Heir.

Ginny spent most of her time divided between helping Hermione finish their new shield and coordinating another team in the search for the reason behind Voldemort's seeming immortality. Normally this would be a fruitless search except for the fact Ginny had recently begun to recall most of the memories from Riddle's diary. From there she was able to piece together at least a few things, mainly where the terrorist had been during his summer, Christmas and Spring holidays. Those memories also gave her valuable insight that allowed her to second guess the bad man, and more often than not, be right. And what the fiery red-headed witch had found was chilling.

The diary was something called a horcrux. Apparently, Tom had used ancient dark soul magic to split a portion of his soul off and put it into the diary. The theory behind these dark, evil items was as long as a piece of your soul was attached to the horcrux, your soul was prevented from crossing over when your body stopped working. The process also made it possible to either re-join your original body, or in

Riddle's case, enter a new body either specially made or already living. In essence, you could never die. The bad side is that the horcrux itself was very weak, and could be destroyed easily if someone knew what it was. Thus most evil wizards put multiple layers of protections on the objects, and hid them away. The diary, for example, had multiple layers of fire and anti-damage charms placed on it, to the point it took a basilisk's fang and venom to damage and destroy the horcrux and release the soul within.

What was even worse was that with Voldemort's return it was painfully obvious that he had made more than one of these vile artifacts. Otherwise he would have passed on the moment the diary was destroyed. The question was how many was made, and what would he have used. Fortunately for everyone, Ginny remembered a conversation between Riddle and his potions professor, during which his thinking was revealed. Seven pieces, not including himself. Yes, the part he kept would have made eight, but there was a special ritual he wanted to do that would have moved all his horcruxes off into another plane, forever rendering them completely and utterly safe. This ritual would not only have tied his soul to this world, but his body as well, making it truly indestructible. It was the darkest and most vile path to true immortality, and all Riddle had to do was locate the actual ritual.

From there Ginny determined that while Riddle had wanted to use Harry's death to make his final seventh horcrux, but he was unaware that at the time he had actually succeeded. Thus, even if he had discovered the Immortality Ritual, he would not have performed it. Instead he would have held on to the spell, causing him to lose his chance to do so when the eight of them came back to the Ministry Six's original time. The wraith they fought on Fate's plane was the soul fragment of Riddle himself which proved, in a way, that love was really Harry's greatest weapon. For the love Harry felt for each of his wives, their returned feelings, and Lily's sacrifice made it impossible for the three of them to win that fight. Now all Ginny and the other team had to do was search for and find the remaining horcruxes. Ginny had confided in her that she had a very good idea of what they were, and with the spells she had learned from Riddle's soul piece finding their current locations would not be difficult either.

In the meantime Hermione, Harry, and Luna had another task in front of them. The three of them were now standing outside of Potter Manor's dueling chamber. Inside was Hermione's parents, who had spent these last two and a half weeks reading and studying five years worth of spell guides, transfiguration guides, and potions volumes. Last night they had shown a remarkable grasp of the theories in these books, even going so far as to be able to cast a couple of rudimentary spells. Yes, they had unlocked her parents' magic earlier than planned, but as Harry pointed out, they had already performed the Title Ritual to proclaim her as Lady Ravenclaw. Her position was now confirmed, and the Gringotts identity check would show her to be Lady Hermione Jane Granger-Ravenclaw. There was literally no reason to keep them from their magic any more. So it was very easy for Hermione to agree when her parents insisted their magic be unlocked as soon as possible as a way to make up for Hermione's inadvertent snubs.

She took a deep breath and opened the door to the dueling chamber, letting Harry and Luna enter first. Her parents were not quite aware of it, but their newly formed views on what magic was would now be turned upside down and irrevocably changed. Modern textbooks showed what the Dumbledores wanted known, which left the majority of the British Magical World, and to a certain extent the rest of the world, weak and pliable. Indeed, almost all references to the old ways of performing magic had been all but destroyed. The only references left which gave in depth and exacting information on the old magic could only be found in the Founder's chambers. Hermione's parents were going to be the first witch and wizard to receive the benefits of their discoveries. Boy were they in for a surprise.

"Hello class, and welcome to Magic Essentials. This course will teach you magic in a clear, concise way that will enable you to fully understand how it works, and how it doesn't. By the end of this course you will be able to cast spells with and without your staff." Hermione's parents looked to each other as if confused and then turned back to her. But before they could ask she spoke up again, "Yes, I'm aware that you are currently using wands, not staves. But as you will soon see, the wand is more a hindrance and a crutch than a tool. Magic is not something that a wizard or witch commands through external artifacts, it is an energy is produced and flows

through the body, adjusting to the wishes of the user. Magic is a part of us all. It is not something that can be denied to any magic user, no matter what the Dark Lord or the Ministry wishes you to believe. Any questions so far?"

It was evident from the faces of the two new magical people that they weren't quite expecting Hermione's teaching style. But these looks were shortly replaced by an understanding. This was class time. In here, she wasn't their daughter, she was their teacher. She was here to teach them control of their powers, as well as spells and skills that would both simplify and save their lives. Thus they needed to treat her as such. Paulina was the first to recover as she raised her hand. Hermione smiled slightly at this as Harry and Luna set up several pillows and other objects around the room. Once Hermione acknowledged her, she began to speak, "Lady Ravenclaw," Paulina started, acknowledging her status, "The books you had us read before stated that staves were extremely rare, and that complex wandless magic was all but legend. Either way, both would be usable only by those of great power. How would we be able to use either one?"

"The books we had you read all had one thing in common: they were all treatises on modern magical thought. More especially, they are what the current Dark Family and its shadow puppets want you to think. We had you read that to understand just what is considered normal in the magical world, so you do not attract too much attention," Hermione answered with a smile. "Thus they are slanted against the use of true magical power in an effort to keep the general populace weak and pliable. The reality of the matter is simple. The wand is supposed to be a child's tool, much in the way young children use pencils before pens. They exist to get you used to feeling your magic and letting it flow through you. That's all they're supposed to be for. By your mid teenage years you should be familiar enough with your magic to render the wand all but useless. Still, there are some spells that require a great deal of finesse or a large amount of power. That is where the staff comes in. You see, unlike the wand, which only has one core, the staff has a minimum of three distinct cores. The number of cores for a staff depends on the magical and emotional complexity of the witch or wizard involved, especially their strengths and weaknesses. Thus while wands can be made from the

same tree and same donating creature, and therefore be a lot alike, a staff is truly unique to a wizard. No staff will work fully for anyone other than their bonded user, at least not within several generations.”

“Add to those cores the focusing stones, different types of woods, and several other possible enhancements, and it is no wonder each staff is truly unique,” Harry added from the side. “Power therefore isn’t really a matter of consideration. What matters more is attuning the staff to the user.”

“So in other words,” Richard spoke up, “A staff will work for an individual no matter what their power level is, so long as it is blood bound to them? I thought blood rituals were considered dark magic.”

“They may be considered such by the Ministry, but the important thing to remember is not all blood rituals are actually dark,” Hermione answered while bringing the focus back to her. She then gave Harry a thankful smile for his clarification before continuing, “The main reason the Ministry for Magic defines all of them as such is due primarily to the campaigning by the Dark Family. Their plan is to keep the magical world ignorant, and they have been rather successful by banning entire branches of magic. Light blood rituals are few, but they all share one common goal: healing and protection. Neutral blood rituals are even more rare, and they are focused on binding objects, such as the blood ritual to bind a staff to a witch or wizard. The rest can be considered dark, even if they have beneficial results. What is important to remember is that dark does not automatically equate to evil, at least where spell work is concerned. It is true a great many dark-orientated witches and wizards tend to stray down the path of evil, which is mainly due to the average dark practitioner’s propensity for the pursuit of power. It is possible to be dark-orientated and still be good however. For example, a person who uses necromancy to guard a religious location could actually be good, even if they are in fact dark. At the same time a person who uses only healing spells to keep an evil murdering psychopath alive and functioning is evil, even if they don’t use a single dark spell. There is, of course, a point where dark spells and evil spells converge into one point. Can anyone, other than my assistants, tell me where?”

Richard raised his hand and waited before answering, "The Unforgivable curses?"

Hermione nodded and motioned for Luna to step up, since this went into her area a bit more than her own. Luna looked at Richard with her usual wide-eyed stare and answered, "Correct. While there are arguments that the spells can be used for good and noble ideals, those arguments often forget one important detail, which renders them void. Intent is key for these spells. They are examples of what we call "polarized" spells. Polarized spells are spells that require an emotional component in order to work. You simply cannot use them without that emotional component, for they require too much power otherwise. For the Unforgivables the key emotion is hate. You have to absolutely hate your target. You can't use righteous anger or any other emotion, only strong hate will do. The same is true for the other end of the spectrum. For example, the patronus charm uses love for its feeding emotion."

Paulina looked shocked and protested, "But all the books that reference it says that happy thoughts were most important for that spell!"

Luna shook her head but smiled as she replied, "Yes, the books do say that. And that is what is taught by the magical world today. But what you must understand is that the happiest thoughts of any individual using that spell is based upon love. Harry, could you give an example please?"

Harry nodded as pushed away from the wall which he had been leaning against. Before he could say anything though the door opened to show James and Lily. Harry just motioned them in as he began to speak. "You're late, but that's okay. Hermione can give you the cliff notes version of what you missed later." He watched as James shrugged apologetically while Lily dragged him to a seat. Once they were seated he continued, "Okay, the patronus charm is known to be a particularly difficult piece of magic that not all adults can perform, primarily due to its power requirements. That is the reason given out by educators today, even though it is false information. The real reason it is such a difficult piece of magic is because witches and wizards are taught to use the wrong emotion to

fuel the charm. For example, when Remus Lupin first taught me the charm, he told me to pick my happiest thoughts.”

Harry had to pause at the dark looks his parents were showing when it came to the werewolf Marauder. They were still angry with him, though Harry more pitied him than anything else. Still he continued on after sharing a comforting look with his father, “I picked flying, since I love it so much. It of course failed, because no matter how happy flying makes a person, the emotion is not strong enough. I tried several different memories, all the happiest ones I had, and none of them worked. Finally I found one memory that did, but it wasn’t really a memory. What finally allowed me to cast the spell was a sense of belonging I had in a ghost memory of my family. It wasn’t even a clear memory, since I was effectively orphaned as a baby, but it was powerful enough to trigger the love inside of me which was necessary to power the spell. It wasn’t until a few years later that I discovered, mainly from asking around, that the memories that worked best for the patronus spell, and produced actual corporal patroni, were memories based upon family and friends. In other words, where the entire environment was charged with love. Then while in the Americas I found an old Native American “wise man” who showed me a spell very similar to the patronus. He explained that the spell had nothing to do with happiness, more to do with love and belonging. Thing was, the spells weren’t that far off. That, combined with Holy Magic, eventually led us to proof that the patronus spell was one of the only Light Magic spells kept by the Dark Family, mainly because it is the only known defense against dementors, levifolds, and other such creatures.”

“It is interesting to note,” Hermione interjected, “That polarized spells all contain one component that cannot be translated arithmatically. The emotional component cannot be translated, only vaguely approximated. It is one of the ways a person can actually tell the difference between polarized and normal spells.”

“Another interesting point,” Luna added with a wink to Harry, “Is if you pour your emotions into any spell, it becomes more powerful than otherwise.” Hermione frowned slightly at Luna’s interjection as if she were slightly annoyed at the blond’s interjection, but Luna just gifted

her with a smile before continuing. "The spells Hermione is talking about however are ones that require an emotional component, otherwise they just won't work. The expecto patronum spell was used as a primary example of this. It simply cannot be cast without a strong emotional component, at least not by anyone who doesn't have almost minor godlike levels of power. Normally there's only one such person in a century, but with the world on the brink as it is now there are three who could. But they are the exception to the rule and even then they would be laid out with magical exhaustion for at least a week."

"Who are those three you're talking about?" Pauline asked curiously.

"Albus Dumbledore and Tom Morvolo Riddle are two of them," Harry answered in return. "It's the only way old snake lips can cast the spell, to be honest. But he's got cheats that allow him to recover more quickly than either of the others."

"That's two, who's the third?" the question was asked when it was obvious that Harry wasn't going to say anymore.

"Harry is the third person," Hermione said with a smile, quite enjoying Harry's response of sticking his tongue out at her. "The difference between the three is that both Dumbledore and Riddle obtained their power through ancient rituals. Harry's came to him through nature and prophecies. He's pretty much been charged by the Powers That Be to put things right."

"Though I do what I do because it's the right thing to do, not because somebody told me to. Besides, the Dark Lord would never let me alone anyway," Harry interjected with a shrug.

Luna walked over to Harry and slipped her arm around his waist, pulling him into a one-armed hug. "Which is why he'll win, and why we love him. Besides, he has us to keep him on the right path," she said with a kiss. It was obvious she was answering some question that only she could see, that perhaps even Harry could not quite grasp within himself. Yet it was delivered in that "far out there"

expression that made many people underestimate her and declare her “Loony.”

“Getting back to point,” Hermione said after clearing her throat. “Wandless magic and incantationless magic used to be quite commonplace in the magical world. That started changing when the darker families started to take control, until we arrive where we are today. We have an entire civilization that is utterly dependent upon their wands to the point if you break those wands, they are utterly helpless. Therefore we’re going to start our practical lessons with small, first year spells done without wands, but with motions and incantations. By the end of the day, everyone here will have cast at least one spell without a wand. Any questions?” When it was obvious neither the Grangers nor the Potters had any questions, she had them line up to start with the lumos spell. None of them found it easy, but she was true to her word. By the end of the day they each managed to cast at least the lumos spell without their wand. It was obvious the “adults” would catch on relatively quickly.

Buckingham Palace
London, England
July 26, 1996
Harry’s POV

Harry followed quietly behind some unknown government official as they were led up the left side of the Grand Staircase of Buckingham Palace. Gone were the robes of the Unspeakables that they normally wore. Instead each of the 9 of them (Jason was with them) were dressed in rather utilitarian business suits. Harry carried with him a large metal briefcase that was both locked and secured to his wrist while Hermione and Luna flanked him on each side, obviously acting like security or perhaps bodyguards. Behind the trio were Neville and Ginny, followed by Ron and Jason. Everyone was on alert, so it didn’t surprise Harry at all when he heard Luna say mentally, ‘There’s a moving picture here.’ Harry stopped on the fourth red-carpeted step up and peered closely at each of the pictures. The official stopped several steps up from them when he noticed he was no longer being followed.

“Just a security precaution,” Harry answered smoothly as he located the picture in question. It looked like one of the former kings, supposedly King George, in a red jacket and white pants, probably a military uniform. The movement itself was hard to spot since the figure remained mostly still, but the eyes seemed to give it all away. Once he identified the correct painting he wandlessly froze the portrait before turning to the official and asking, “Is that the right painting?”

To say the man was shocked would be an understatement, but after about two minutes of protesting the man confirmed that the portrait was indeed a fake. Rather than cause a large commotion however, he realized that Harry had been right and said so. A short time later, the painting was covered and scheduled for removal. It would be gone the next morning. Still, with the threat to security underway, the group was quickly shuffled from one of the minor state rooms to the White Room. There they were told that they’d have to wait as the security guards made sure that everything else was okay before meeting the Queen. Harry acknowledged this, then sat on one of the yellow sofas with Jason and Hermione, while Luna, Neville and Ron sat on the opposite sofa. A butler came in and moved some other chairs toward the couches, placing one just in front of the yellow fireplace guard. Others were placed in a semi-circle at the end of the sofas, allowing room for all nine of them plus two more, not counting the Queen.

Finally after what seemed like forever the doors opened and steps could be heard from behind the screen partition behind Harry’s sofa. He stood up, followed by the rest of the team and Jason in time to formally bow toward the Queen and her entourage, which consisted of two middle-aged men. The Queen nodded in their direction before taking her seat in front of the fireplace, which allowed the others to be seated. Finally she looked toward one of the gentleman with her and said, “Mr. Suthers, it is not often we attend a meeting where we not only are not aware of the people we are meeting with, but where we are not aware of the topic. Perhaps you can explain to us what is going on?”

Mr. Suthers, who looked to be a nondescript middle aged man with brown but greying hair and hazel eyes nodded in response. “Forgive

the lack of information Your Majesty, but necessity for secrecy is, in this case, paramount. Not only because of the topic of this briefing, but because of the personnel involved. I must ask that you allow the guards to wait outside, for the information provided today is covered under the highest levels of the Official Secrets Act, and the fewer people we swear in the better. I will personally vouch for each person here today."

The Queen did not look amused. But she never-the-less waved her guards out, instructing them to close the door afterwards. Her posture took one of impatience bordering on annoyance as she spoke, "This had better be good, Mr. Suthers, or I will talk to our Prime Minister about replacing you. Especially since he is not present for this, a fact I find most disconcerting."

"Please forgive us Your Majesty. The very fact this meeting was happening at all could not be known, for there are subversive personnel even in the PM's office. The information we are going to provide you now is of an extremely sensitive nature. We could not risk letting certain people within Your Majesty's government be aware of it," Mr. Suthers responded. "As head of MI-5 I had to make a judgment call based upon what I know, and this meeting would have raised too many questions for the PM to answer. We will inform him of the contents of our report when we can without endangering either the privacy of this information or the Prime Minister himself."

The Queen looked even less amused by this latest revelation, and was prepared to make everyone aware of it. "Mr. Suthers, do you and Mr. Baker mean to tell me there's a danger to our Prime Minister, and you're letting that danger sit there unchecked? Do you mean to tell me we ourselves are not safe here? Perhaps you'd better start actually explaining yourself rather than apologizing. Starting with who these people are."

The head of MI-5 looked like he was about to start shaking from the looks the Queen was giving him. Still, he swallowed once and continued on, "Your Majesty, I have brought these people here today to do just that, in great detail. At least one of the names you will recognize from a prior briefing, though it will seem quite impossible to be true. For the moment I must ask that you take their identities as a

matter of faith until we are able to explain in greater detail during the briefing. First I must present the magical counterpart to both myself and Mr. Baker. Normally they do not give out their identities, but in his case it's well known. This is Jason Blackwell, head of the Department of Mysteries within your Majesty's Ministry of Magic."

Jason bowed his head toward his ultimate boss, who looked surprised. Still she apparently kept what Mr. Suthers in mind as Jason picked up the introductions from there. "Your Majesty, thank you for allowing us in your presence. I just wish this was under better circumstances. These people with me today are the members of our Team Gamma. They're a highly trained group of Unspeakables who, despite countless manipulations and obstacles being placed in their path have managed to discover a clear and present danger to both the magical and the non-magical worlds. They have initiated a code Violet emergency and have satisfied me as to their justifications."

"What is a code Violet emergency, Mr. Blackwell?" the Queen asked in a concerned manner after seeing the head of MI-6 pale significantly.

"The second most urgent alert level we have, Your Majesty. To put it in deployment terms, all other projects of my department can be frozen without notice with no explanation or exceptions, save for those involving immediate, widespread life and limb. It is used when a situation occurs that threatens all of Britain, both magical and non-magical, or that would cause the statutes of secrecy to have a catastrophic, irreversible failure. The only level of emergency above it automatically freezes my entire department and places it in the hands of the team declaring it. Unfortunately we are very close, within a matter of weeks, of declaring such an emergency," Jason informed the Queen.

But he did not give the woman any more time to ask further questions by continuing on, "The reason for this is simple, the Ministry of Magic has been leading your governmental officials, and by extension you, down a path of lies that extends back generations. These lies present an extreme danger to both governments, with the extreme likelihood of it spreading to other nations. We have incontrovertible proof that

the Ministry of Magic has been in the hands of subversive and hostile elements for as long as it has existed, and the Wizards' Council before that. In fact, the Ministry of Magic was created to strip the power from the Wizards' Council in order to enable the persons responsible for this conspiracy to rule much more efficiently. In order to explain this to you in greater detail, may I present my Team Gamma? The man with the briefcase is Duke Gryffindor, born Harry James Potter. The lady on Gryffindor's other side is his first wife, Duchess Ravenclaw, originally born Hermione Jane Granger. On the couch opposite Ravenclaw, the blonde is Duke Gryffindor's second wife, Lady Luna Gryffindor. Beside her is Duke Hufflepuff, born as Neville Longbottom, and beside him is Ronald Bilius Weasley, Heir of the Weasley seat and contestor to the Slytherin Duchy. In the first chair next to him is his sister, Ginevra Weasley, followed by Lily Potter nee' Evans. Then you have my colleagues, followed by Lord James Charles Potter, Head of the Potter family."

The look on the Queen's face did not bode well for the group of Unspeakables. In fact, Harry had a strong hunch that she was within a mere seconds of calling in her guards, and for a brief time he couldn't understand why. 'She still thinks Harry Potter is a 15 going on 16 year old boy, not a 21 going on 22 year old young man,' Luna commented quietly to him. 'Luna's right, she's more than likely been briefed on you, Harry. To her we can't be anything but imposters with those introductions.' Harry nodded quietly and solemnly as the Queen turned her most frosty glare to him. "Give me one good reason to not call in my guards," the Queen demanded, dropping the royal 'we' in her anger.

"Your Majesty, I am well aware I'm supposed to be a 15 year old boy," Harry started to explain in a calm, confident voice, "But as you are well aware of the magical world I am sure you're aware there are ways to accelerate one's growth, both malignant and benign. In a way we had gone through one of the more convoluted means available. To put it simply we were sent back in time for training, accumulating about six years of experience. Now normally such an action would be illegal, but there were another two prophecies that were made about us that required us to take these actions." With this he began to explain Luna's prophecies, then launching into an over-view of their six years in the past before ending with, "Finally we had confirmation

that James and Lily Potter were the Children of Time. We suspect that as such they have an innate sense of timing and time control spells than any of us ever would. Thus we used a separate series of rituals to make it appear like the Potters had died and returned to our own time.”

The Queen’s outrage had been growing at first, but it was soon replaced by a calculative expression, which was then replaced by a curious expression as she asked, “Very well, but we are aware those four houses have been missing for a long time, and yet you claim them now. And even assuming you have the right, James Potter would be in line for the Gryffindor title before you.”

“That would normally be correct,” Ron piped up, causing the Queen’s attention being turn toward him, “But the qualifications for being an Heir of one of the founding houses are different. In the Gryffindor house, the rules of succession for both magical and non-magical inheritances are the same as they are for most families. Ravenclaw’s line was matriarchal in nature. It went dormant due to a hostile curse, and Hermione was the first magical girl born to the Granger family for centuries, so the title passed to her. Hufflepuff’s was chosen by magic. Duchess Hufflepuff cast a spell on her line that allowed her line’s magic to chose who was the magical heir, and then put in her will a clause stating the magical heir would be the legal heir as well. She then filed a permanent copy with Gringotts in order to keep it going until all her lines died out. Since the Longbottoms are one of the two main lines of Hufflepuff, he was in the running and magic chose him. Slytherin... Well, I’m sure Your Majesty recalls that my title proclaims me contestor to the Slytherin seat, correct?”

The Queen followed this carefully, then nodded in response, “Explain, but still remember you have not answered our question yet.”

“As you wish, Your Majesty,” Ron returned before leaning a little more forward in his seat than he had been. “Popular belief today has it that Slytherin was the epitome of pure blood supremacy, and a Dark Lord of his day. I’m aware that your files probably say different, and your files would be correct. It is true that Salazar Slytherin did break from Hogwarts School, and did, for a brief time, become dark,

as did his family. However that is not all that happened. As it turns out my ancestor was put under a combination of the imperius curse and a loyalty charm by the true Dark Lord of the time. His son, the one I'm descended from, found out and broke the charm. Salazar then tried to leave, but my ancestor's brother did not wish to. Their differences sparked a line war between Salazar's sons, during which the dark son killed his own mother. This enraged Salazar, so he decided to let the lines fight it out. Now, due to legal and image problems in those days he could not be seen to favor one son over the other, so he demanded that the lines take different names until such time one line was vanquished, at which point all that was Slytherins would go to the head of the surviving family. However in private he gave my family two gifts to aid us in our fight. First, he set the Weasley inheritance chain into reverse. The youngest son of the youngest son would be heir. We were solidly in the light, so there was little worry about us killing off our own relatives. Second, he cast a spell on the Weasley line that would keep us from being noticed by the Dark Family that was coming into power. Slytherin saw what this family was up to and wanted us protected from them. But yet we could not take the same option as the other lines, and hide ourselves. Instead our line was disconnected from our parent line by magic much like the fidelius, triggered to end either when we outed ourselves or when a daughter of the line reached 21 years old. The second event happens in a couple of weeks."

"And as far as why my son has the title of Duke Gryffindor as opposed to me, it is because my father bequeathed it to Harry, as he had lived for fourteen years in his time line with us considered dead. Truth is we weren't on this world or even on this plane of existence, so by all legal and commercial records he's been Duke Gryffindor and Lord Potter since he was one. Thus by my father's wishes and our agreement, I'm going to take the Potter Lordship and leave him with the Gryffindor Duchy. This way he has the tools needed to defeat the true Dark Lord as he has been charged to do," James interjected as an answer to the Queen's implied question.

"So we'll have two wars in the magical world?" the head of MI-6 asked. "First we have this Voldemort fellow that Mi... Duke Gryffindor is supposed to defeat, then we have the war between the Gaunts and

the Weasleys? I take it this Lord Voldemort is the last of the Dark Family that you mentioned?”

“Not exactly,” Harry replied as Hermione started to unlock the briefcase Harry was carrying. “First of all, Lord Voldemort is an alias. His real name is Tom Morvolo Riddle, son of Tom Riddle, a non-magical man from Little Hangleton, and Merope Gaunt.” The Queen and her officers all started at that statement before looking between Harry and Ron in confusion. Harry gave them a warm smile and said, “Let me guess, you’re wondering how that’s going to work with the first prophecy the way it reads? Well, that prophecy doesn’t really apply to that particular situation, as Tom Riddle is not the true Dark Lord mentioned in the prophecies.”

Mr. Baker literally fell out of his chair, and Mr. Russel nearly followed. The Queen lost all dignity and looked very shocked as she croaked out, “Explain.”

“The Bumblebee family did not die out Your Majesty,” Luna replied calmly. This of course was met with confusion from the Queen and Mr. Baker, but Mr. Suthers paled even more as he recognized the name. “They changed their name and began to work behind the scenes, portraying Light Lords as they systematically went about trying to destroy the Founders Lines.”

“Thanks to some advanced planning on the Founders’ part, the new line could not take over the Wizards’ Council. Special laws were enacted within the Council Provisions that kept the Dark Family in check. To put it simply, no part of the Provisions could be changed or deleted without the approval of a quorum of the Founding Family seats and the Crown’s Representative. This meant that when the Council decided to form the Wizengamot and the Ministry of Magic, the Provisions could not be changed since the seats had gone unclaimed. This is significant for two reasons: First those five seats hold veto power over all non-provision laws, both past and present. The entirety of the Wizengamot could vote to make everyone wear green and silver, but if the Founder Seats and Crown votes it down, that’s it. That leads to the second reason, the Ministry of Magic and the Wizengamot, in their current forms, are non-provisional laws. In

essence, the Queen's Representative and the Founding Families could abolish the entire Wizard's Government with one simple vote," Ron explained. "The only problem is the Dark Family buried the provisions as well as the history of the time, so precious few people know these laws are in place."

The Queen and the heads of MI Five and Six took a moment to pause and confer. At the end of that private discussion the Queen herself looked rather pale. "Are we to understand this Dark Family is the Bumblebee line, and is still in existence today? Are we further to understand the insurgency you are here to warn us about is this particular Dark Family, who holds high positions within our magical government?"

"Yes your Majesty," Harry answered regretfully as he handed a stack of papers out of his briefcase to Mr. Suthers. "I'm confident you will recognize the name they changed it to. I'm even sure you've had contact with him. Bumblebee changed their name to Dumbledore and disappeared long enough for people to believe they had been beaten." The directors of intelligence started to curse under their breaths, which the Queen really didn't hear due to shock. "The magical world is in deep trouble Your Majesty. Your government elected your enemy in the most powerful position in the government. He also is the Headmaster of the most prominent school of magic in Britain. Thus our visit today. Your magical government is controlled by the True Dark Lord. We have analyzed the first prophecy, and have come to the conclusion that the Dark Lord I'm destined to vanquish is not Tom Riddle. He's Ron's enemy. Instead I am to face off against Albus Dumbledore."

"I can't believe it," Mr. Suthers stated. "If you're right, the magical government has been in the hands of traitors for centuries. And yet he has done nothing outside of the laws. How can this be?"

"When one can write the laws, and has no reticence about abusing his or her position, nothing that person does is against the law," Hermione interjected, finally speaking. "The Dumbledores held integral parts of the worst laws in our history. The most well known

atrocities they're responsible for is the Statute of Secrecy, followed closely by the laws denying other magical beings their rights."

"We were told that the Statute of Secrecy was vital to avoid panic within the non-magical world," Queen Elizabeth replied. "It prevented the magical world from being completely destroyed, and reduced if not eliminated the violence building between the magical world and the non-magical one. How can that be an atrocity?"

"Your Majesty," Hermione began, "We have proof that at least forty percent of the violence that non-magical people visited upon magicals at the time of the ratification of the Statute of Secrecy was instigated in some way by the Dumbledore Family. No one ever caught on, save the Hufflepuff line. They, along with the Gryffindor line pulled together all the proof they could find and sealed it within the Founder's Sanctuary. They really wanted to stop this, but were unable to without exposing themselves, and risking the complete fall of the magical world to the Dumbledores after their deaths. Neither the Crown nor the Founders' Heirs were strong enough at the time to do anything with the Slytherin line under contestation and the Ravenclaw line missing. So they stored the proof away until the day came that the lines were once again united."

"Don't misunderstand us Your Majesty," Neville continued, "The original reasons for the statute were valid, in a very limited and small scale way. The events the majority of the world pointed to were highly exaggerated. From there the magical world pulled back from the non-magical in varying degrees. Here in Britain though its little more than a license to hunt non-magicals. After all, only those highest in a country's government could even know of our existence. Even then, you aren't told all that much, and have no say in our government. Of course that goes against the Wizards' Council Provisions and the agreement between the Crown and the Wizarding government. But that, in the eyes of the statute's creators was okay, since those provisions were not known. And they certainly did not want you to be aware that any non-magical not directly related to a magical person was attacked and mind-wiped without need of consent." This did not sit well at all with the non-magical people there; a fact they were silently letting Jason know.

“I’m sorry Your Majesty. We were not aware this was against any laws or even our own mandates until just recently,” Jason explained quietly. “Though in some cases it was probably a good thing, considering that some of the people we obliterated were abusive parents. But over-all they’re right.”

Harry nodded in agreement with Jason and interjected his own thoughts, “Merlin knows that I used to wish Uncle Vernon and the Dursleys could have been obliterated. I would have preferred to be anywhere but there. But they wouldn’t have ever paid for their crimes. Not to mention we would never have discovered all that we have if I had been moved. In a way, it’s better things went the way they did.”

“ Personally I always thought it rather hypocritical,” Hermione continued, “To oblivate a wizard is wrong and illegal in most cases, but no one thinks twice about obliterating a non-magical. They even have an entire department within the Ministry for Magic who’s sole purpose is to do just that. And they’re supported by several committees and sub-departments. In fact it wasn’t until recently that there was even a department within the Ministry that was charged with preventing magical people from abusing non-magical. And that department is considered a joke, just above the liaison offices for other magical species. It’s no wonder there’s been so many Goblin Wars. In fact, the current laws of the Ministry for Magic seem to be based upon giving the human magical population more rights than anyone else, including non-magical. And with the proof we have here, that’s more by design than accident.”

With a grim nod the Queen and her officers took many of the papers that were given as proof and moved to another part of the room. The Queen sat at a piano as the directors of MI-5 and MI-6 went through the evidence, quickly scanning it while talking amongst themselves. ‘So what do you think?’ Harry asked his mates as the others laid back quietly.

‘I think we’ve convinced her. If anything we’re going to have to keep her from doing a military solution,’ Hermione responded quietly

across their bond. 'The last thing we want is a war between the magical and non-magical world. We'd be completely annihilated.'

'I don't think they'll go for the military solution. Queen Elizabeth strikes me as far too astute for that. But I do think she's one step away from declaring martial law in the magical world. Enforcing it would be problematic for her, but she's well justified,' Luna responded. 'I just hope she realizes that the obvious solution is going to cause major problems in the non-magical government. The two governments won't mix well. The laws are too contradictory.'

Before Harry could respond to that the Queen got up and moved back to her original seat. The elderly woman looked both angry and worried, though it was well hidden behind the visage of royalty she kept up at all times. "Military intervention would spark a war," she started as she directed her gaze toward Harry. "Calling for martial law is not something that can be done at this time, though it is an idea for later. The Council and its supporting magical government has moved out of control. Yet according to the Provisions and the Crown's Charter, your family, as well as the other three Founder Lines, is charged to maintain Our will. Are We correct in saying that the magical world is supposed to be primarily a monarchy, with a few adjustments?" At Harry's nod the Queen shook her head and said, "We're sure you have a plan to correct this problem. We would like to know what that is."

The team simply looked to Harry, as this was his show from here on. "The way we see it we've got three goals: get rid of the Dark Lord, restore the true government, and get rid of the Dark Puppet. Voldemort, who we call the Dark Puppet, will have to be the first thing to do. As long as that threat can be held over the heads of the magical population, any attempts to achieve the other two will fail. To this end we have determined how he managed to live the last time and now have teams out to rid him of the protection he has against death. And because of who he is, Ron will be the one to vanquish him. From there we will have to move fast and use the political wave from Riddle's death to clear the Wizengamot of Death Eaters. With them gone we can then remove the true Dark Lord from his seat of power, and at the same time restore your rule. There will of course be preparations leading up to this, including "finding" the "lost" Provisions

of the Wizards' Council and the Wizengamot and circulating those quietly. We can use the penalty provisions from the Charter as an additional tool to convince everyone that cooperation is the best and in many cases only solution."

"What are these penalties that you are speaking of?" the Queen asked curiously.

"May I approach your Majesty?" Harry asked in answer. It took her about a minute to nod her acquiescence to the request, at which point Harry leaned over and whispered the punishment into her ear. The Queen smiled momentarily before frowning, but Harry held up a hand. "We only intend to point it out, not use it. In fact we plan to let people know you don't want to use it, but that you're within your rights to. We also will have to explain attacking you in any way would exact that penalty not only on them but their family as well. If we paint things right, the Dark Lord will be in for a large surprise when the matter comes up. Either way, once we have control of the magical government we'll be able to veto many of the oppressive laws on the books. Unfortunately that will only be the start of the problems with the true Dark Lord, as he's in control of the International Agency responsible for enforcing the Statute of Secrecy. Our going public with our existence will be in direct violation of that governing body."

"So We should be ready to support Our magical subjects with military force," the Queen concluded, more of a statement than a question. "And this will be at a time of heavy political turmoil as the non-magical government and the magical one are not compatible. We will have to bring our Prime Minister into this discussion, Gryffindor."

Harry of course bowed deeply at the comment before nodding. "I am aware of that, Your Majesty. Our own Department of Mysteries will have to be on alert when we remove Dumbledore from his position. I would recommend opening conferring with some of our allies. They need to be aware of what is going on. If we can get some of them to throw off the International Confederation of Wizards at the same time, it will delay their response long enough for us to get things organized here. The United States, France, and probably Spain would be the most receptive. Germany won't follow, that's the seat of the ICW. Italy

won't follow either, and Belgium and Sweden will be up in the air. But the point is we want to avoid military confrontations as much as possible. The last thing either world needs is yet another war. To that end I hope we can gain enough allies to pressure the ICW into capitulating."

"And just how likely is that to happen, Duke Gryffindor?" Mr. Suthers asked, sounding both doubtful and resigned at the same time.

"At the moment it can go either way," Luna spoke up, her eyes somewhat glossy. "Dumbledore will not go easily, we will have to be prepared to physically force him out of the Commonwealth. From there the future becomes too open."

The non-magicals of the room looked at Luna in shock, but Harry just chuckled and blew her a kiss while sending her his love through their bond. "I'm sorry, Luna's a Seeress. Unfortunately we are living at a crux point in our lives, there are just too many divergent paths to allow her to see too many details of any one path." Luna merely smiled and nodded emphatically as Harry continued, "That's a rough-over-view of what we have planned out so far, it's not much, but I had to plan for flexibility. If any of you have any suggestions to help improve our odds, we are most ready to hear them."

The discussion continued on for another hour when there was a knock at the door. Mr. Baker got up to answer it as the room fell quiet. A whispered conversation at the door was barely heard before the director of MI-6 came around the screen to address Queen Elizabeth. "Your Majesty, the Prime Minister is here and is most insistent to see you. His secretary and a couple of people I don't know are with him."

Jason was about to order Team Gamma into their cloaks, but they had already beaten him to it. Instead he turned toward the Queen and whispered, "Please don't tell him what we were discussing until we are sure who is with him and where they stand. One of the portraits was moving when we got here, and while it we had frozen it, we don't know if there was someone else in the portrait before we detected the movement." Once the Queen nodded her acceptance of the request, he himself stood up and pulled his wand. He was just hiding it behind

his back when the Prime Minister, a tall black bald man with an earring, a younger lady in a business suit with a heart shaped face and bubblegum pink hair, and another tall young man with red hair, a pierced ear, and freckles with a dark blue business suit joined them.

John Major seemed in a hurry, and as such was speaking even as he turned the corner. "Your Majesty, there's a sit..." That however was as far as he got as the people with him all pulled wands on the unspeakables. But even as the wands were drawn the Unspeakables drew theirs up, summoning their opponents wands to them. Another whisper had four more wands summoned from hidden places amongst their bodies. Just as fast chairs were conjured behind them, to which they were quickly bound. "Wait just a minute!" the Prime Minister shouted before having a wand pointed at his chest. The room became very quiet, save for the muttering of the female unspeakable next to the Prime Minister. Finally she looked up and said, "He's clean."

"Thank you Firebrand," Harry said with a smile toward his mother. Then he turned back to the Prime Minister and said, "You brought potentially subversive people into Queen Elizabeth's presence. We took precautions to ensure her safety. If you would be so kind to find a seat, we will ascertain these people's intentions." This of course was met with protests from the bound witch and wizards until Neville cast a silent silencio on them. "Thank you Liber," he muttered before turning towards the bound people. "Firebrand, we'll start with this gentleman," he said, indicating the black auror.

Firebrand pulled out a box from her robes and quickly expanded it. From there she pulled out several leads and with a sticking charm applied them to the man's head, making sure to cover the vast majority of it. Then, after tapping the box with her wand, she nodded to Harry. "What is your name?" he asked. The man did not seem like he was in a cooperative mood, so he simply did not answer. Finally after five seconds of the black man resisting some kind of internal pressure, the man finally looked up in confusion. "This device forces you to tell the truth. If you refuse to answer a question, it will persuade you to do so. Now again, who are you?"

“Auror Lieutenant Kingsley Shacklebolt.”

“Why are you here?”

The other two magical people that were with the Auror start to struggle, even as Kingsley tried not to answer the question. Finally the machine won and he said, “We were asked to protect the Queen.”

Harry thought this through for a moment before asking, “Who sent you?”

“Albus Dumbledore.”

The Queen, her non-magical intelligence officers, and Jason all frowned deeply at this. Harry congratulated himself upon making the right choice and moved on. “What are you to protect the Queen from?”

“Unknown wizards who were accompanying the Head of the Unspeakables.”

“Why?” the Queen asked herself.

“Albus believes the Unspeakables are working against the magical government. He was concerned that they would use the imperius curse on her in order to start a war.”

‘That has just enough truth in it to hurt,’ Hermione whispered through their link.

‘No one ever accused Fumbleduck of being stupid,’ Harry thought back before asking the next question. “What were you to do when you had us in custody?”

“We were to use a portkey to take you away and attempt to repair the damage you had done with the muggle government.”

“Did he tell you how you were to accomplish that?” Harry asked as the Prime Minister found himself bound to his chair. Hermione started to set up a similar box up with him after silencing him as well.

Auror Shacklebolt definitely did not want to answer that question, but the machine soon coaxed the answer out of him. “By any means necessary, including either obliviation or reconditioning.”

At this both the woman and the other man slumped into their chairs, both seeming to give up. Ron sighed and shook his head while he focused on the red-haired man in front of him. No words were said, but it was fairly obvious there was a family connection there. In the meantime, Hermione asked the Prime Minister a question. “What is your name?”

“John Major, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.”

“Were you aware of their mission?” Hermione asked.

“No. I was told by the Minister for Magic that these people needed to be escorted to the Queen. I was instructed that her life was in danger, and that these people could help her.”

Harry nodded at that information before looking back to the Queen. “He’s yours. Just be aware that he can’t lie while attached to that machine. He’s also encouraged to give complete answers, so there aren’t any other extenuating circumstances.” The Queen nodded before he turned back to the Auror still hooked up to the machine. “Are you aware that the instructions you were given are against the law, both magical and non-magical?”

“No. They are not against the law. Muggles are not, as a rule, to know of our world. Those muggles that hold leadership of a country can know about us, but only to a point. Beyond that point they are not cleared for the knowledge and can be obliviated just like any other muggle,” Auror Shacklebolt attempted to correct Harry.

“I’m sure you are aware that one of the Department of Mysteries’ charters is to aid in the enforcement of magical law, just like the

DMLE. Well, let me show you something,” Harry said, pulling out a page of the ICW charter, the Crown’s Charter, and the Provisions of the Wizards’ Council. Handing the last two to Ginny and James, he motioned them forward to hold the documents in front of the questioned auror. “Please read the indicated passages. This document is the ICW charter concerning the Statute of Secrecy. Once you are done, the other two who came with you will be given the opportunity to read this as well.”

‘Shouldn’t we have checked them for the mark first?’ Luna asked as the Kingsley read the first document.

‘They’re both too junior within the Order to be marked. Though I am checking for the mark now, and I can’t find anything on any of them,’ Harry replied as he moved to the woman. “What is your name?”

“Tonks,” the woman replied as she looked at the badge. “And considering the spanking you gave Albus a few weeks ago, I don’t want to be on your bad side. My full name is Nymphadora Tonks. Please just use the last name.” As she read the document she paled. “What is this document.”

“Thank you for not making me do the same to you. This is a copy of the articles of the ICW’s Statute of Secrecy,” Harry replied. She too was clean, a fact that he was grateful for.

By the time the three documents were read by the three people, Harry walked back to the Auror Lieutenant and said, “What you were sent to do is illegal. Are you a member of the Order of the Phoenix?”

Kingsley, who looked dejected and defeated, nodded in response. “Yes.”

He looked to the other two magical people who also nodded in agreement. “Were you marked by Albus Dumbledore?”

“No. What are you talking about?” was the answer provided by the wizard hooked up to the machine. The other two also indicated

negative, though Tonks added more, "Neither one of them would have any idea what you're talking about."

This of course got the attention of everyone in the room. Tonks looked around and paled slightly as her hair turned blonde. "I take it you, on the other hand, do know," Harry replied darkly, "Do we need to hook you up to the machine?"

Tonks shook her head negatively before answering aloud. "No, you don't need to in order for me to talk, though you may want to hook me up to verify that I'm telling you the truth."

Hermione then disconnected the Prime Minister from the machine and reconnected it to Tonks. Once it was all connected Harry began with a verification, "Are you marked by Albus Dumbledore?"

"No, though I know someone who is," was Tonks' answer.

"Who?"

"Remus Lupin," was the answer. Both James and Lily frowned deeply at this answer, looking rather enraged.

"What is the mark for?"

Tonks' face developed a rather sorrowful look as she said, "It serves multiple functions. First it marks the Headmaster's inner circle. The inner circle members are Albus Dumbledore's most ardent supporters. They're the people he uses to do the dirtiest of jobs, including guard duty of Harry Potter before he was taken by the Department of Mysteries. They're also the people who are privy to the most secrets, though that isn't nearly as much as Dumbledore himself. The second function is to enforce loyalty of the circle members. Every time they try to betray them, they feel pain. The worse the betrayal, the worse the pain." A gasp was heard from Firebrand, though the other people seemed to ignore her. "Third it works as a communication device. It allows him to let his followers know he wants to see them. Lastly, it works as a shortcut for his legilimency. Only those who are immune that art can block him when they have his mark."

This was a cause for a pause while the terminology was explained to the Queen. "We'll need to think this through thoroughly," Harry said to his team and the crown. "How do you know all this? Does Dumbledore know you know?"

"No, he doesn't know I know this," Tonks answered the second question first. "Remus Lupin had a breakdown about a couple of weeks ago. He wasn't making much sense, but he swore up and down he was visited by the ghosts of Harry Potter's parents. They apparently accused him of being a traitor. He was so distraught he nearly killed himself. The only person he would talk to is me, so I eventually got his whole story out of him. Even though the pain was killing him, he had to be shriven. Finally he vowed that no matter how much it would hurt him, or even kill him, he'd make things right."

"Albus Dumbledore is a Dark Lord," the red-haired man said in resignation and horror, his head hanging low. "I can't believe we're serving him." The self-disgust in his voice was evident.

"You can redeem yourself," Ron answered as he stood in front of his brother. "What is your name?" He had to keep appearances after all.

"Bill Weasley."

"Well Mr. Weasley, your youngest brother is working with us and Mr. Potter. We'll ask him to contact you within the next few days. He'll provide you and your family with instructions on what you can do to help him. In the meantime, tell your family about this, and secure their minds. I'm sure you know charms that can fool Albus Dumbledore."

Bill nodded emphatically as he smiled up to the Unspeakable. "Yes, I do. And I promise I'll work as hard as I can to help you."

Harry had no doubt of Bill's sincerity on this, for if anyone not currently a member of Team Gamma would recognize dark magic, it was Bill. He turned toward his parents to find them deep in conversation, though they glanced over toward Tonks from time to

time. Finally James stepped forward and handed her a piece of paper. "Get that to Lupin. It's a drop spot. If he's serious about making it up to the Potters, he'll turn over any information he can to us via that drop spot."

"He's to spy for you?" Tonks asked surprised.

"Yes. Unless he's truly turned his back to the ideals he grew up with," James said. Harry personally thought his father was pushing it, but he wasn't about to interrupt. This would either work or they'd be exposed prematurely, necessitating an obliviation. He watched Tonks narrow her eyes, but since she wasn't looking at him he couldn't use legilimency on her. Still, he could see the wheels turn in her mind as she thought things through.

In the end she took the paper and nodded to James saying, "I'll take it to him and explain. No one will know about this from me."

This of course left him with Kingsley Shacklebolt, who was looking at his comrades with something akin to shock and dismay. "What are you two doing?" the black man asked.

"Realizing they were wrong," Harry answered for them, thereby gaining Shacklebolt's attention. "You were sent on an illegal errand by someone who apparently did not care if you were captured. Three against eight, nine if you count Jason? Not exactly good odds there. So there's one of two reasons he sent you. You're either cannon fodder or bait, or even both come to think of it. Either you're here to ensure that the Queen is leery of our claims, by removing her sense of safety, or you're here to lull us into a false sense of security by thinking we've taken all he's willing to give right now. That means that if your bait, there's a larger, more formidable force outside waiting for us. Or you could be both by allowing Dumbledore to spin our treatment of you as further proof we're working against the government. In any way, you lose. Now is that consistent with the Dumbledore you think you know?"

"And while you're thinking of that, think on this," Ginny said as she moved forward to face the senior auror. "Harry Potter nearly died

when his muggle relatives got him home. If it weren't for us, he would be dead. And yet on more than one occasion he has been advocating that Mr. Potter should go back to his relatives, the same ones that tried to kill him. Why? Even if there were some magical reason for him to be there, some kind of protection, it obviously has failed to protect him from his family. Would a Light Lord do anything like that? Could he live with himself if he were?"

These points shut the man up as they were spoken, for there was obviously nothing that the senior auror could say to refute any of the questions. Bill looked even more horrified while Tonks' skin, hair, and eyes paled to white. The signs were there, but no one seemed to notice. Tears slowly started to fall on each of the three intruders faces as the truth of just what was at stake with Harry hit home. Finally Kingsley Shacklebolt broke down and agreed with the others. From there the bonds were removed, and the group of them plotted the next step. Harry himself inwardly breathed a sigh of relief, counting one hurdle as passed. The next would be Gringotts.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry
Hogsmeade, Scotland
July 27, 1996
Dumbledore's POV

Albus Dumbledore sat behind his desk, his elbows resting upon it as he steepled his hands on front of him. He rested his chin on his fingers as his gaze swept across the room across the members of his inner Circle. To his left was Minerva McGonagall, his third in command. Over the years she had been a slight disappointment to him, as the strict disciplinarian had slipped when she first took over as assistant headmistress. Something about that day changed her, making her softer and allowing her feelings. The spells and bindings he had placed upon her somehow had vanished, and to this day he could not figure out how. Given her disappearance, he had to assume someone removed them, but who was one of the questions involved. Why was another, but all leads led to dead-ends. There were no wand signatures, no memories. The memories weren't obliterated, they were simply gone. Still, she retained the mark and supported him in his endeavors, even if it wasn't as fervently as before. Therefore she could remain where she was.

Next to her was Remus Lupin. The man had a werewolf's natural resistance to some of the properties the mark, but still he had come through when no others could. Even if Lupin had argued with him a couple of times, especially where Harry was concerned, there was no question of his loyalty to their cause. Still, with the boy virtually unreachable now, a large part of the man's usefulness had been reduced. This in a way was a good thing, however, since the man seemed to be suffering from an emotional background. Remus' situation made Albus very glad he had long since used that emotion-deadening spell on himself. Yes, he could still feel, but not to any normal extent. This saved him from the pain the prematurely aging werewolf was going through. Not having a conscience was a good thing.

In the left corner was Alastair Moody, ex chief auror and head of the Order's military unit. Of course this was military unit no one knew existed, even its members. Each member of the military unit had implanted within them a command that, when they heard it, would release a completely different personality to the original. Of course the original would be destroyed by the emergence of the second command, but you could not make an omelet without breaking some eggs. Only Severus, Minerva, Alastair, and himself knew the command, and each had layers of protections to prevent someone from finding them. Alastair's was simple, he had a fake persona layering his real one. To the world he was known as a crazy and paranoid ex-auror. Underneath he was a battle-hardened warrior seemingly without a conscience. The personalities were melded together in a manner that only Alastair himself knew, so there was no way short of a complete mind scan to detect the mind alterations. This enabled him to work as Albus' enforcer while maintaining an image of a man past his prime.

Opposite him was Dedalus Diggle, his legal man. The man was an absolute genius when it came to the law, only surpassed by Albus himself. He was also, privately, without a heart. Of course most people considered lawyers to be that way, a fact that Albus had found frustratingly false. Many of them were far too moral, one way or the other, to support him in his efforts. Then came Dedalus. This lawyer had no compunction about breaking the law, and even more

importantly, was able to do so without being caught. It was with Diggle that Albus had bounced his ideas on how to gain control of Harry Potter in the first place. It was his contacts that got Black placed in Azkaban without a trial, something that Albus couldn't afford to do himself, not without arousing suspicions. Add to that Diggle's propensity to play someone without a lot of common sense in public, and he became a vital tool for Albus.

In the right corner was Elphias Doge, and standing near the door was Mundungus Fletcher. Each one of them had their own uses, with Doge working as a "counter" to Albus in the ministry. After all, how could he control both "sides" of the equation without someone seeming to be against him. Doge had "unwittingly" fed more information to the Death Eaters over the years than any other person, save Fletcher. Fletcher worked in the insidious underground of the wizarding world, acting as a de facto go between his puppet's forces and his own. Between the two of them Tom never realized he was being guided, which was exactly how Albus wanted it.

Finally to the right was his second in command, Severus Snape. Albus had groomed the man personally over the years, nudging him this way and that, until the dark follower realized he was being manipulated and approached him. This was soon after he had delivered the first part of the prophecy to Riddle, something that Albus had inwardly cheered. Tom of course existed to keep the public's eyes off of him, and by letting him think the chosen one was after him it was virtually guaranteed that eyes would be away from Albus. That one stroke of luck, properly taken advantage of, enabled Albus to take the reigns of the world tightly within his own. Now there was nothing that could be done to stop him. And with Severus' aid, both by whispering thoughts into Tom's head and by playing foil to Albus himself, no one would expect him to be the true Dark Lord. He was safe in anonymity, with only Severus and Minerva knowing his true identity. Of course neither knew of his true plans. That would simply not do. Inwardly smiling at the pleasant thoughts those plans were generating, he decided to get this meeting started.

"I have received a report from the team we dispatched to the muggle Queen," Albus finally spoke, causing all whispered conversations to cease. "The wizards were looking for muggle

assistance against Tom Riddle. They did not succeed, and the Queen was properly obliviated. Still, we can use this to our advantage against the Unspeakables. Even if we can't get Potter back, we can throw some serious doubts against them, and by extension Harry. We will spin this as them going beyond their charter in talking to the Queen, something only the Minister for Magic and the Head of the Wizengamot is allowed to do. We'll leave the why's open, but intimate it could not have been for good reasons. It is regrettable that Potter should have another bad year, but that's what he gets for running off on his own. We cannot allow Amelia to turn his image around."

Solemn nods were the only answer he got from his inner circle, save for Remus, who just stared blankly toward the door. Albus inwardly thought it might be time to put the werewolf out of his misery. Unfortunately, Lupin was still needed as someone Harry could trust in the unlikely event that he could get his hands on the boy. Speaking of his "weapon," it was time to put his new plan into motion. "Speaking of Amelia and Harry, I have determined there is no way to remove the boy from the Bones house, at least not legally. Nor can we afford to have the Order be accused of kidnapping him. Therefore I have decided that Harry needs to be guided toward matters of the heart. More to the point, it is time for Potter to find "true love." And, after looking over the prospects quite closely, I have determined that young Ginevra Weasley would be the most suitable person for this. Her parents are devout Order members, and she herself has suffered at the hands of Tom. She is the only person that could be expected to reasonably connect with the boy."

"But how are we going to guide them together Albus?" Diggle asked. "It's not like we can get a law forcing half bloods and muggle born to marry pure bloods. Even with the pure blood bias in the Wizengamot, that would not work. None of the pure blood lines want their blood tainted."

Albus had to smile at the question as Diggle had just played into Albus' hand. "No, using the law won't work. Potter is nothing if not stubborn. He'll dig his heels in at the first attempt to do something along that line. Instead we'll have to use a mixture of potions, spells, and access to pry the "Golden Trio" apart and get him talking to young Miss Weasley. But to that we need to consider bringing the

senior Weasleys into our circle. While we have not attempted this in the past due to Arthur's stance, his wife now has gained enough influence to sway him to our cause. Once they are here, we can use them to drive young Mr. Weasley away from Potter and toward Miss Granger, then "helpfully guide" Potter to young Miss Weasley."

As everyone whispered and nodded in general agreement to the plan, Albus leaned back into his chair. What they did not know is that Albus knew of his soul bond at least to the Granger girl. Marrying him to the Weasley girl would cause Potter to die, and paint Weasley as the person to split up a soul bond. The world would turn against the Weasleys as splitting a bond is considered to be anathema. This would destroy the last of the Potters, allowing the Gryffindor line to finally die, and discredit the Weasley family, thereby completely removing any chance they could have of making a political comeback. And with the Gryffindor line completely gone, there was nothing the Hufflepuff heir could do to wrest control of the Commonwealth from him. His position as a world leader heavily relied on his being the de facto leader of the United Commonwealth, therefore the Founder Lines, the ancient enemy of the Dumbledores, could not be allowed to resurface. Harry could not be allowed to take advantage of his lineage.

A short discussion of the ways and means of their manipulations ensued, and finally the Order had a plan. To Albus, everything was running perfectly. Now all he needed to do is approach the Weasleys, something he would do in a couple of days, after he got back from his vacation. After the meeting closed and the rest of them filed out, Albus turned toward his right and left hand people and said, "Severus, Minerva, it's almost time for my usual week's vacation. I'll approach the Weasleys when I get back, so do not breath a word to anyone about our intentions to bring them into the inner circle. There should be very little happening during this time, so just maintain our status quo, and I'll deal with anything that comes up when I return." Smiling at his compatriot's nods, he failed to see the beige string shrinking out of the door. And the castle, now free from the Phoenix's influence, was not going to let him know.

A short while later, a teary, heart-broken man smiled at the one person he was living for as he wrote a letter. Once done, he folded it

up and handed it to the woman, a grateful smile appearing on his face despite the pain he was now feeling. His heart was buoyed by the relief he felt at being able to atone for his sins. That letter may have been a small step, but the first steps toward redemption usually were, and at least this time he was doing the right thing.

A/N:

First of all, as my Beta points out, with James alive he'd normally be first to get Duke Gryffindor. But for the sake of this story, and continuity with previous chapters, I had to come up with a way to "make it work." And to be honest, I don't know of any laws where someone "came back to life" after so long dead, so please just bear with me there. :)

Second, in this story please bear in mind there is a declared line war between the Gaunts and the Weasleys over the Slytherin title. Since the war is about the inheritance to begin with, Ron and others often refer to the Slytherin line to be "under contestation." Again my Beta points out that this is not the case, that the Slytherin line is not and never has been contested by proper British Inheritance Laws as the Gaunts would have inherited the title due to being the elder line. Of course the entire point becomes moot when Voldy dies. :)

And lastly for those Remus lovers out there: I told you to just wait, didn't I? ;)

CHP15